I'm sorry. I love you.
I never stopped.
- Steve

Hang On To Yourself by blithesea, womenseemwicked

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Summary:

Steve gets a little too comfortable, slips up. Billy tries to deal with the fallout as best as he can (which is not very well). Nancy proves again that she has nerves of steel and a heart of gold. Jonathan is there for the ride. Can our star-crossed lovers weather the storm? Tune in for the big finale.

1. A Fool in Love

Author's Note:

We're back! Sorry for the lack of updates for so many weeks now, loves, both of us have been hectically busy and though we had these chapters written well in advance we didn't have the time or energy to go through and edit until everything settled down.

With that said, we're going to be posting things a bit differently around here for this final stretch, because we very much do want you guys to get these final six chapters, and clearly we can't be trusted to maintain a weekly schedule.

So! Tl;dr,

From now on, chapters will be dropping daily, and they will now actually be chapters here, not posted as individual stories in a series. (That just seems the easier way to do this, as well as being... let's say... thematically appropriate.)

Thanks so much for following us on this journey, if you have, or even for stopping by for a chapter or two (the posting situation was designed so that you could do that without feeling like you were missing out).

It's been a wild ride!

Summary for the Chapter:

"Hey, pretty boy."
"Yeah?"
"Dropped something." Billy points to a stray piece of paper that must have fallen out of Steve's book, full of bored class doodles.
"Oh. Thanks, baby," Steve sighs thoughtlessly and

bends to pick it up.

Even though Steve has mentally prepared himself for a weekend of boredom and loneliness, to his surprise it turns out completely different. On Friday night he meets a couple of the little critters at the arcade and lets them wrangle him into a few games, getting begged to stay whenever he makes an effort to leave. He knows it's mostly for what must seem to them his endless supply of quarters, but still. Dustin' face when Steve beats his Galaga high score makes Will laugh so hard his coke comes up his nose. It's a good night.

On Saturday he goes shopping in the mall on the outskirts of Hawkins, and runs into Nancy, completely by accident. She helps him pick out a new shirt he thinks Billy might like, and he treats her to a sundae in the food court.

"So, when are we going to meet this new girlfriend of yours?" she asks with a smile, and he feels a bit of a flush creep up his cheeks. He wants to tell someone about Billy, so bad. Would Nancy think he was nuts? *Probably*.

"Not a girlfriend," he mumbles, "We've just been on a couple of dates…" It feels bad to lie, and from the look she's throwing him, he can tell Nancy isn't even close to being convinced, but she lets the matter drop.

She asks him to come over to her place on Sunday, and he spends a few nice hours playing Monopoly with her and Jonathan, and an even nicer time sharing a joint with Jonathan in the backyard afterwards. Still thinks of Billy every other minute (what would he be like, playing Monopoly? Probably wiping the floor with all of them). But now the longing has turned into a mellow, gentle ache.

"You ever miss someone so much, even when they're right there?" he asks Jonathan, staring wistfully at the cloudy sky. Jonathan shoots him a strange look, doesn't reply. Steve feels like an idiot.

"Not Nancy! God. That's not what I meant, honestly."

Jonathan takes the blunt from Steve, lights it again, shrugs. "Yeah."

“It sucks,” Steve sighs.

And it still sucks by the time he lies in bed on Sunday night, thinking of Billy, but. Monday is just hours away.

—

Billy has major cabin fever by Sunday night. He’s bouncing off the walls with pent-up energy, and the urge to sneak out and find Steve’s bedroom window has never been fucking greater, but Neil took away his keys and - as good as it turned out for him last time he decided to throw caution to the wind and go for a *walk* at this hour - Billy suspects Steve won’t be out there with a warm Beemer to save his ass this time.

So he smokes half a pack and does pushups until he’s tired. Around two in the morning he puts the needle down on the final track of his mom’s old copy of LA Woman (Riders on the Storm has always been one of his favorites, different as it is from the rest of his music taste), and turns the speakers off so he can just barely hear the sound coming straight from the vinyl.

The next morning he wakes surprisingly well-rested and feeling good. It takes him until he’s stepping out the front door to realize the source of his good mood: he gets to see Steve today. The realization almost knocks him back, although at this point it hardly should, but Max’s grumbling behind him that they’re going to be late grounds him again. By the time they get to their neighboring schools, Billy’s only *slightly* buzzing with anticipation of locking eyes with Harrington from across a crowded classroom.

--

English Lit is Steve’s favorite class, and not because of fucking Oscar Wilde, (he didn’t like that guy much to begin will, but now he’ll never be able to stand his writing, just on principle.) but because if he gets to the classroom first, Billy has to pass his desk to get to his own. Just the sight of Billy coming in makes Steve grin like a loon. He opens a book at a random page to hide his smile from the rest of the world. Except that Billy actually stops next to Steve’s desk.

“Hey, pretty boy.”

Billy’s tone is so close to how he uses those words when they’re alone now, that for a moment Steve actually thinks they are.

“Yeah?” Steve asks.

“Dropped something.” Billy points to a stray piece of paper that must have fallen out of Steve’s book, full of bored class doodles.

“Oh. Thanks, baby,” Steve sighs thoughtlessly and bends to pick it up.

—

What little chatter there was around them in the quiet classroom dies out almost immediately, and Billy feels a rush of horror through his veins. *Do something. Say something,* he thinks hopelessly, but he’s frozen. Can’t think of a single thing to get them out of this.

Luckily, a substitute teacher comes into the room just then - young and busty and all Billy could ever dream of in a distraction from the flush he can feel coloring his cheeks as he rushes to sit down and turn his back to Steve.

Billy slips his mother’s pendant out of his shirt - careful not to bring Steve’s with it - and if he prays, it’s a little rusty and not in proper form and almost definitely ineffective. Because by lunch the school is buzzing, and it’s mild enough that Billy might not have to leave Hawkins forever, which makes it that much worse, because that means he can fix it still. He knows exactly how. He just wishes he didn’t.

--

Man. Steve could kick himself the second after it slips out. He tries to keep his head down, tries to play it cool, like nothing happened. *Oh, that thing in English? My tongue just slipped, what do you take me for?* But by the time he is about to go to lunch, it’s getting harder to ignore the whispers, and the stares. It’s worse than the time Tommy and Carol told everyone he and Nancy and Jonathan had a threesome last year, or the time Tommy told everyone that Steve cries himself to sleep every night, or the time Carol told everyone he stole her panties

because he can't control himself around silk. Nobody really believes any of the shit Tommy and Carol say. This one is on himself.

Steve tries to stay above it all, pretend he doesn't hear the rush of voices around him. He's gotten so good at pretending shit like this doesn't get to him in the past year. He can weather this. In the cafeteria he doggedly steers towards the table where Nancy and Jonathan are already sitting, without looking left or right. They look up guiltily when he sits down, and he has a feeling they've been talking about him, too.

"Hey," he says, and quickly turns towards his vegetable mush, though he isn't hungry at all. "Anyone else look forward to casserole day every week?" he tries for humor.

—

Nancy chews her lip and glances at Jonathan for help. But he just shrugs and takes a bite of the sandwich he brought from home, not even glancing at Steve.

"Steve," Nancy starts, doubtfully.

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"Yeah," Steve nods, "I know. Shouldn't expect anything edible, after all these years." He drops his fork on the tray and moves on to the pudding cup, but he doesn't look up. Nancy might just take one look at him and *know*.

—

"Steve," Nancy presses, rolling her eyes and trying to get him to look up at her. "What's going on? I heard-- well, you know what I heard. Are you--?"

--

"No, what did you hear? Is something going on?" Steve says maybe a little too brightly, because when he looks up at Nancy, she actually looks almost worried.

“There was this thing in English, um. It was nothing, really. But people seem to be freaking out a bit?” He shrugs. “You know how they are.”

—

“So it’s true?” Jonathan says quietly, looking up and meeting Steve’s eyes from under his bangs. “You called Billy Hargrove ‘babe?’”

Steve’s expression is enough to tell Nancy that it is true. What she can’t figure out yet is *why*. She puts her hand gently over Steve’s and draws his attention back to her.

“I’m sure the context of it made sense, right, Steve? You were just joking, or something… Right?”

--

Steve can’t help it. Nancy’s earnest gaze makes him flush. He thinks of denying it, of insisting that he actually said *Billy,* not *baby*, and that people just heard it wrong. But what’s the point? No one would believe Nancy and Jonathan if they spread that story. They are known to be his friends, after all.

“Right,” he says tonelessly, looking down at his tray of uneaten food again. “That’s just how it was.”

—

Nancy and Jonathan meet eyes and share disbelieving looks. Nancy still isn’t sure what’s going on here, but she’s starting to think that--

“Hey listen, don’t worry about it, man,” Jonathan leans toward Steve over the table and says confidentially. “I know how it is. People have called me queer for ages. Hell, *you* have. But it’s nothing. Whether you are or not, it’s-- I mean, my *brother* might be one. It’s not a big deal. It’s all just chemical, right?”

Nancy glances between them, frowning. Is *that* what this is? Surely Jonathan’s taking this too far, right? Steve was never anything but wholly committed to her when they dated. She remembers how excited he’d been to have sex with her back before everything, and

feels guilty. But that means he's straight, right? And you can't like *both… Can you?*

Nancy remembers Barb saying something about "liking both" in the soft, light hours of a sleepover once, but they had both been hazy with sleep. She hadn't taken it seriously at the time - had figured it was just a philosophical thing. Barb was prone to those.

--

Chemical? Steve frowns, trying to understand if Jonathan is making fun of him. But no, Jonathan Byers may be many things, but he's not a complete dick.

"I don't know what you're talking about, man," he replies, trying to laugh it off. "I mean, you remember that you're going out with *my* girlfriend, right?"

It feels mean, going down this route when Jonathan is all full of understanding and shit, but. Steve finds he really doesn't want his fucking pity, on top of everything else today.

—

"Steve, what the hell?" Nancy hisses, as Jonathan pulls back looking guilty. Steve is usually so sweet but he can be *such an asshole* sometimes. Nancy wonders how she didn't see that when they first started dating.

--

Yeah, ok. Steve feels bad about it. But when he looks up he catches a glimpse of Billy by the door, and his apology to Jonathan dies on his lips. Billy jerks his chin to the side, and walks off. Steve swallows, his throat suddenly gone dry. He doesn't hesitate though. Not *much.*

"I'll see you guys in class," he mumbles even though he won't - he doesn't have any classes with them, and gets up and follows Billy out of the room.

—

Billy steps into the bathroom just outside the cafeteria and glances around. Two freshmen boys glance up from their urinals to stare at him.

“Get out, dipshits.” It feels good to go for intimidation. Billy realizes it’s been a while since he did.

One boy immediately goes for the sink, dick still out, while the other carefully puts himself back in order. Billy rushes the one at the sink, not intending to touch him, but then *he* doesn’t know that. The boy yelps, and both of them rush from the bathroom as Steve comes in the door.

—

Steve raises his eyebrows at the two boys almost running him over on their way out. If they’re an indication of Billy’s state of mind, well. This is going to be horrible.

He walks in, leans against one of the sinks. Doesn’t quite dare walk up to Billy, let alone touch him. He doesn’t fancy spending the rest of the day with a black eye. So he stands at a safe distance, and waits for the storm to hit.

—

Billy glances under the bathroom stalls cursorily, hits the last one with the palm of his hand, hard.

“You just couldn’t keep your mouth *shut*.” His voice is more shattered than angry. More worried and disappointed. But there’s plenty anger in there too. “What, Friday wasn’t close enough for you? You gonna fuck me in the middle of the fucking court now, too? I can’t fucking —” He cuts himself off, hitting the bathroom stall again, and turns on Steve.

—

“You think I did that on purpose?” Steve frowns. “You know I didn’t! If I could go back and change it, I would!”

He couldn’t help flinching at the sound of Billy hitting the stall door

before, but he is not going to step back when Billy comes at him, he is *not*.

"It was just a mistake," he says, a little softer. "I'm sorry. But maybe it's not so bad, they're gonna forget about it if we ignore it, right? And it wasn't like you said it back…"

—

Billy shakes his head curtly.

"Have you heard the chatter out there? We're supposed to hate each other, Harrington. This is the biggest news since Laurie Whittaker puked in Biology. If you don't have 'Queer' painted on your car by the end of the day it'll be because Tommy H broke his fucking arm," *and that's a promise*.

Billy catches his own eye in the mirrors over the sink and schools his face into uncaring.

"We have to take a break," he says. "That's the only way we get through this. I'll call you whenever I can but we absolutely can't be caught together outside school until this blows over."

--

"A break?" Steve tries to catch Billy's eyes to see how he means that. *He can't really be serious? Not after everything they've done?*

He clears his throat, tries to steady his voice.

"You mean break up?"

—

Billy's attention snaps to Steve and he frowns.

"No," he says, perhaps too sharply. "We're not doing that. We just… have to lay low for a while. But I'll make it go away. They won't remember past Spring Break. I just have to do some shit first." He grimaces at the thought.

--

Spring Break? That's ages away, and Billy said *after* Spring Break. That's three fucking weeks! Steve nods numbly, though he can't believe anything out of Billy's mouth is actually real.

"What, what shit?" he asks, not sure if he really wants to know.

—

Billy glances miserably at the door, reaches under his collar and pulls out the pendant Steve gave him on their first date. He takes it off quickly and holds it out to Steve.

"Just-- keep this safe for me," he says, forcing it into Steve's hands and pulling his own hand back away quickly. Drawing it over Steve's cheek briefly before he turns away. "And whatever you do, don't freak out tomorrow, okay? It's gonna be alright."

He turns back to give Steve one last attempt at a reassuring glance before he walks out the door, heart in his throat and feeling like he might throw up.

--

Steve stares at the stone pendant in his hand, not quite sure what just happened. Billy had *said* they weren't breaking up, but. He didn't even want to keep this? What fucking harm could one pendant do?

He forces himself to take a deep breath, and resists the urge to do something stupid with the pendant. His first instinct is to throw it in the trash. If Billy doesn't want it anymore, the damned thing has no fucking purpose Steve can think of.

Keep it safe for me — He doesn't throw it away, but just having it there is like a thorn in his side. Maybe he could wear it. Like Billy did. But then he can hear a voice in his mind (sounding clear and logical, and a lot like Nancy), telling him how stupid that would be. People have seen the pendant on Billy for weeks. If suddenly Steve starts wearing it, everyone will just fucking *know*.

Steve slips it into his pocket and turns towards the sink, splashes

some water in his face, then he looks dully at himself in the mirror. He doesn't want to go back, not to lunch, not to class, not to fucking basketball practice. *Ditching it is, then.*

--

Billy spots Vicky Marsden walking out of the cafeteria the moment he leaves the bathroom and squares his shoulders.

She's the biggest gossip in the school besides Carol, and god knows Carol would only end him up in an even bigger world of pain. Not that she wouldn't be up for it, but that Tommy would fight him for her, and Carol would just stand by and watch with delight. Probably sell tickets to the show-down. Not worth the hassle. But Vicky…

He calls after her, not too loud, not too eager, just enough to make her feel *seen*.

She turns around to glance at him and smiles. Nods for her girlfriends to get lost. They don't look pleased to miss the show, but they clearly know they'll hear every detail of whatever this is later, and they leave her without much fuss.

—

"Billy Hargrove," Vicky all but purrs, looking him over appreciatively. Easily one of the best pieces of ass in this school. She knows, because she and her girlfriends have a rating system. "So you *do* remember my name. I thought maybe you'd forgotten it, along with my telephone number…"

There isn't any heat behind the words, just a playful pout. Billy Hargrove is water under the bridge, she's moved on after their little fling. Several times.

—

"Yeah well, you know," Billy shrugs. "Last game of the season coming up, I've been busy. I'm not tonight though," he smiles suggestively. "Are you?"

--

“Tonight, huh?” Vicky keeps a straight face, though the relentless way Billy Hargrove is pushing his luck gives her a profound feeling of satisfaction. Also, she remembers him as quite a good kisser. It’s a Monday, so the most exciting thing she’ll probably do is wash her hair and watch Dynasty. Not really a question.

“Steve Harrington not free tonight, then? I hear he’s got quite a thing for you…” She runs her hands up the lapels of his jacket. “Babe.”

—

Billy doesn’t have to work to produce a look of disdain. Vicky’s bright blue fingernails on his chest is enough to make that natural. Let her think it’s in response to the thought of fucking around with Steve. He shakes his head.

“Never seen a guy stumble over a comeback so bad,” he smirks. “You call him ‘pretty boy’ one too many times and he just snaps. ‘Hey, *baby*.’ I could’ve pissed myself laughing.”

--

“Really, *that’s* how it went down?” Vicky files away the information for a proper gossip session with the girls later. The versions she’s heard so far have run the gamut from Steve calling Billy *sweetheart* to Billy carrying Steve’s books for him to class. Not that anything Billy Hargrove says has to be true, but.

“I thought you two hated each other…”

—

Billy rolls his eyes. *Hate?*

“What I feel for Harrington isn’t strong enough to be characterized as hate,” he lies through his teeth easily, pulling on the repressed impressions he had when they’d very first met. “He’s a thorn in my side, and only a halfway decent basketball player. That’s it.”

He smirks down at Vicky and it’s strange to have someone even a couple inches shorter than him stand so close but he acts like he likes it. Slips an arm deftly around her.

“But what’re we talking about that loser for? I want to talk about you. How good you’d look in the back of my car,” he says suggestively, sort of starting to walk them toward the front of the school.

—

“I haven’t said yes yet, Tiger,” she reminds him, looking over her shoulder to see if anyone is watching, if anyone sees them go together. There are quite a few stragglers hanging around in the hallway. Good. “I got Home Ec in a bit, so you’ll have to cool your heels for now.”

--

“Hm, wouldn’t want you to miss that,” Billy agrees solemnly. “So I’ll pick you up tonight?”

--

She makes a show out of thinking it over. He actually already had her at hello, but she hasn’t forgotten how much of an arrogant dick he acted last time, not even looking at her for weeks after that time in his Camaro.

“Hm, tonight’s no good for me, sugar,” she says, twirling a bit of hair between her fingers. How desperate for it is he, really? She wants to find out.

--

Billy sees what she’s doing. It’s not that she’s bad at playing the game, just that he’s been exactly where she’s standing plenty of times. He knows the tells.

Still, he’s on this side of it now, and he can’t afford to call her out on it. It’s exactly this somewhat-discriminating side of her that will keep people from writing off their fling as him trying to hide his true fag nature. So he plays along. Plays right into her hands as much as it smarts.

“When *is* good for you?” he asks, flicking his tongue out over his

bottom lip and trying to look distracted by her tits while in actual fact just needing some time away from her face. "'Cause I really need to relieve some tension, y'know, and I seem to remember you were pretty good at that last time."

--

"Relieve some tension, huh?" she repeats, pursing her lips. "Boy, you know how to make a girl feel special…" But it's not like she didn't know why he suddenly started noticing she exists again. If she wanted the romance and the heart-eyes and the mush, Billy Hargrove would definitely be the wrong tree to bark up.

"Tell you what," she says before he can roll his eyes at her again. "Pick me up tomorrow at the Mall, seven sharp. And we'll see about that tension of yours, baby."

--

Baby.

Billy shrugs like he couldn't care less, and nods.

"See you then," he agrees as the first bell for fourth period rings.

Billy sits through the rest of the school day in a sort of daze, taking copious notes in classes where he'd normally take none, working hard to distract himself from the pit in his stomach. Of course he didn't think he'd *never* be in this position again, having to fake his way through an affair with some chick, but after everything with Steve, Billy feels like the very concept of sex has changed so jarringly. He doesn't even know if he can fake it like he used to anymore.

Basketball practice is dull without Steve there, infuriating with all the joking and shit-slinging Tommy and the other boys get up to at his expense, and the fact that he has to play along - and does so convincingly - only makes it worse. After school he works out for hours, hardly noticing the strain until Max shouts at him to turn his stupid music down and he has to set the barbell down for a second. He sleeps like the dead, and in the morning wakes up feeling

unsettlingly comfortable.

It takes him about half an hour to realize why: he'd been waiting for the other shoe to drop since Steve asked him to go steady. Now that, for the foreseeable future, they're sort of quits, he's back in his element. Loneliness becomes him.

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The thought of going back to school on Tuesday morning isn't too alluring, but Steve knows he can't ditch again, not without faking some serious illness. And besides, after he went home the previous day he was nearly bored to tears, hanging around the empty house, trying to nap but not feeling sleepy, just vegging out in front of the TV, which only played crap. None of it enough to distract him from the thoughts running rampant in his head. Replaying the events of that morning over and over again. Wondering what Billy was doing, playing with the pendant in his pocket.

He hadn't taken it out, but just running his thumb over the smooth surface made him feel a little better. It felt warm to the touch, as if it had been just hanging around Billy's neck a few moments earlier. Lying on the couch and surfing through every available channel had been the only thing Steve could muster up the energy for in all this time. He *has* to go back to school today, he can't take another day of that.

Maybe it won't be so bad, he thinks to himself as he walks into school, ignoring the looks. Surely there's bound to be something more interesting to happen soon. Someone breaking their leg, or assaulting the nurse, or just possibly a pack of demonic dogs attacking the teacher lounge. It's *possible*.

His stomach sinks when he gets to his locker, sees the word "FAG" in red spray paint written across. *Tommy really should branch out into some other colors*, he thinks bitterly, and searches his backpack for something to wipe that shit off with. Comes up empty. *Fuck*. He should have brought some rubbing alcohol to school just on the off-chance, maybe.

--

Coming to school on Tuesday is hard enough just being what it is, but when Billy catches sight of Steve standing at his locker looking like he's trying hard to look like he doesn't care about the fact that people are staring at him, like he's not even aware of the red letters sprayed across his locker door…

Billy registers the word and though it doesn't surprise him it sends a thrill of anger up his spine and his fists instinctively clench. How *dare* anyone call Steve a thing like that… He will *kill* the motherfucker who… but that won't help anything right now. Billy doesn't have anyone to direct his anger at, and even if he did, doing so would only lead to more trouble for both of them.

Steve glances up like he can feel Billy's eyes on him, and Billy realizes he's been staring. Glances quickly away. *Fuck.*

--

Oh.

Steve quickly looks away, down at the floor, can't help the way Billy's hard glare makes him feel miserable though. It's going to be like this, all the time? He'd rather not see Billy around school at all, if the alternative is this kind of coldness.

"Steve?"

He turns around to see Nancy standing there, looking concerned.

"Hey," he says, feeling his cheeks still flushed, just from seeing Billy. Fuck.

"Are you okay?"

"Sure." He smiles. Tries to, anyway. Nancy doesn't look convinced. "Gotta run," he mumbles. "Chemistry test." He doesn't have Chemistry, but that's neither here nor there. Slamming the locker door shut, he beats a hasty retreat.

Should have stayed home, after all.

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The rest of the day is a wash after that. Billy doesn't even really remember any of it as soon as it ends. By the time the sun sets all he can think of is Steve's face at his locker that morning, and how what he's about to do will save them both from more of that. It doesn't feel like a convincing argument in his mind, but it's all that keeps him from standing Vicky up after all.

As it is he heads out to meet Vicky at the mall exactly on time, hair sprayed to perfection, cologne everywhere that's important, and all the trash out of the back seat of his car in preparation. He meets her out front, separating her from a group of other Hawkins High students who seem to be hanging around with no purpose whatsoever. He makes nice with them just long enough, then raises an eyebrow at Vicky and nods towards the parking lot.

But she has other plans. She takes them to the food court first, insisting she's been craving a hot pretzel all day. He pays for it, and ends up eating most of it when she realizes how horrible it will be for her figure. They get to talking about clothes, and she makes them stop into a shop which she insists has stuff Billy would look amazing in. He doesn't hate it as much as he insists he does. She nearly talks him into buying a shirt for himself, but then he sees the price tag and quickly ushers her out of the store.

They get along fine, and keep running into other teenagers who look properly interested in what's brought them together as they pass, but Billy's sick with wondering when she'll pull him aside and ask if he's got a condom, or do more than just laugh at any of his attempts at flirtation. Finally, when she mentions how badly she's been wanting to see a movie lately, he has to ask.

"We're not going anywhere else tonight, are we, Vicky?"

--

She raises her eyebrows innocently, links her fingers with his, makes them look like high-school sweethearts to anyone who'll look. But if Billy Hargrove thinks he can just snap his fingers and she'll hop into his Camaro, he's got another thing coming. This time, she's gonna make him shell out for at least a couple of proper dates first. "What makes you say that, sugar?" she asks, her voice pleasant and husky.

“You telling me you’re not having a good *time*?”

He’s about to open his mouth, when she lets out a little squeal. “Look, Dairy Queen! Let’s check if they have Blizzards.”

--

“*What*?” Billy frowns, being dragged along behind her. *What about that figure you were so precious about just a second ago?* he wants to ask. But he doesn’t. It turns out they do have Blizzards, so Billy buys one, and Vicky grabs two spoons and winks at him. *Jesus christ.*

He supposes he ought to be glad she just wants to publically toy with him after all - it certainly saves the rumor mill some trouble digging for evidence of their date, and saves him the effort of trying to look into sex with her - but this is too much. This is romantic cutesy shit he’d be reluctant to do with *Steve* even if there wasn’t the fear of being ostracised and disowned keeping them from hanging out in public like this at all.

That thought just makes him gloomy though, so he shoves it down and replaces it with some of Vicky’s ice cream monstrosity. She rewards him (if rewards is the right word for it) for being a trooper by pushing him up against a wall outside one of the stores after that, and kissing him. More fodder for rumors that will help to push his and Steve’s potential homosexual affair out of the school’s minds tomorrow with any luck.

By the time he gets home Billy should be pleased. The date went fucking *swimmingly* as far as cover-ups go. But instead he just feels lonely. He pulls his phone over to his bed and dials his boyfriend’s number.

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The phone rings, late, startling his father from a snooze in front of the TV, where Steve has been hanging out for hours and hours for lack of anything better to do. Steve only picks it up when his father grumbles and shoots the offending noise a disgruntled glare through sleep-tiny eyes.

“Hello, Harrington residence,” he mumbles, watches his father wave his hands and shake his head to show that he isn’t accepting any calls tonight, no matter what might be brewing at the firm.

--

Steve’s voice is like a balm on Billy’s mind the instant he hears it. He smiles a little and shuffles a hand through his hairspray-tacky hair restlessly.

“Hey… *baby*,” he says, grateful he thought to disconnect the hall phone before making this singularly ill advised call. “Sorry it’s late, I just-- I needed to hear your voice,” he laughs a little at himself.

--

Steve shivers, shoots a quick glance at his dad, who sits there with raised eyebrows. Steve shakes his head to show that it’s not for him, and his dad visibly relaxes, gets up from the couch and wanders into the kitchen. Then Steve can no longer stall. He clears his throat.

“Hey.” It’s too fucking fitting that he’s been waiting for Billy to call for weeks and weeks. And the one time he *does* call, it’s just after shit has started raining down on them. *Fuck*.

“What’s going on?” he asks, quietly, because, who knows, his dad might come back. “You okay?”

--

Billy bites his lip. Shrugs, even though Steve can’t see him.

“Yeah, I’m-- I’m alright. I’m just… sorry about how I was the other day. I know you didn’t say it on purpose, and…” He smiles a little miserably. “I wish you could call me that in public all the time. Let people know. It was kinda awesome, aside from the whole fucking… terror of it.”

--

“I’m sorry, too,” Steve says, and he knows it’s too late, knows it doesn’t change anything, but he really wants Billy to know, and

believe him. “I know I fucked it up for us. I mean, fuck. Not like we were ever gonna hold hands in the hallway or anything, but.” He swallows, wishes Billy would talk some more. It feels so good to hear his voice. “I guess I suck at this boyfriend shit after all.”

--

Billy frowns. Looks down at his pendant-less chest.

“We both do,” he sighs. “But fuck, I-- I like doing this thing with you, Harrington. I want it to work out. I’m gonna do everything I can to get you back, okay? Everything.”

--

Steve frowns. He knows Billy has a thing for being dramatic, but he makes it sound like someone is dying. “Hey,” he says, still softly, but not just because his father might overhear. “I’m not gone. I’m still here.”

He touches the pendant in his pocket, imagines Billy can feel it. “I’m not going anywhere.”

--

Billy closes his eyes. Nods. That feels nice to hear, even if he doubts it a little. What he did tonight-- it wasn’t cheating. It was damage control. And if it doesn’t work to calm the rumors, he’ll finish the job like he’d intended to. He’ll go straight into heterosexual hell with Vicky Marsden if it will make this better. And it will be worth it, because they will be safe. That’s what he tells himself, anyway. But somehow it doesn’t feel true. Billy’s long-dead conscience is eating at him painfully and he feels like his throat is collapsing a bit.

“Hey listen,” he grunts. “I love you, okay? Don’t-- don’t forget that. Whatever happens. I’m stupidly fucking in love with you, Steve.” He chokes a little and breathes through it quickly. “I gotta go. See you tomorrow, stranger.”

--

“Hey, wait,” Steve says quickly, hoping to catch Billy before he hangs

up. He's getting just a little worried now, Billy sounds so odd. Says these words that normally it would take a lot of alcohol or some really spectacular sex to get out of him.

He doesn't hear the line click yet, so maybe Billy is still on it. "Baby, you're… you're okay, right? We'll get over this. Don't worry." He isn't feeling as reassured as he tries to sound now, for Billy's sake. But Billy is acting so weird. Steve wants to make him feel better, even if he doesn't really know how.

--

Billy doesn't have an answer for that. That's supposed to be his line, but he's not sure he believes it. So he presses on the switchhook deliberately with a shaking hand, and puts the phone down into its cradle clumsily, his gut churning.

He thought calling Steve would make him feel better, but it's just made him feel more alone. Billy stuffs the phone back onto its ledge by the door, and puts some Metallica on to sleep. He dreams too much and too hectically to get any real rest, and by morning he feels like death warmed over.

2. Girls, Girls, Girls

Summary for the Chapter:

> Steve is still struggling to get through the aftermath of his slip-up. Nancy is a brick through it all. At the last basketball game of the season, all hell breaks loose.

Sleep doesn't come easy for Steve, and on Wednesday morning he waits nervously until it's time to go to school. Hangs around in the parking lot like a fool, but he ignores everyone's strange looks and whispers. He doesn't give a fuck, he just wants to catch a glimpse of Billy, somewhere where it won't look too out of place.

His stomach flips a bit when he hears the roar of the Camaro's engine. He watches Billy pulling into his usual spot, getting out of the car, saying something to Max which she receives with a cool glare and a raised middle finger before she skates off to Middle School.

Just that little moment on the parking lot makes him feel a little better, enough to get him through the day. He doesn't even mind the way everyone treats him like a leper at school, he wasn't the most popular guy before the whole "baby" disaster. Not since a year ago, when Tommy and Carol decided he was no longer cool, maybe never had been cool to begin with. Whatever. What he does need to do though is patch things up with Nancy and Jonathan. He decides to apologize to Jonathan for Monday during lunch, but the two are nowhere around. It's nice outside. Maybe they're eating in the yard?

Shrugging to himself, Steve decides to eat alone. When he gets in line for the disgusting mush du jour, he can't help overhearing two girls in front of him, especially when they say Billy's name. His ears are perking up just from hearing Billy mentioned, it's really pathetic.

"Yeah, apparently Susie saw them sucking face at the Mall the other night?"

"Ugh, I don't believe that, she went out with Frankie only last week--"

“Yeah, but he’s actually just waiting for Heather to make up her mind, don’t ya know…”

“It’s so unfair though, Billy Hargrove is such a babe…”

“I know, right?”

Steve hides a smile. He actually couldn’t agree with that more.

“So why does he have to go with Vicky, of all people? So unfair.”

Ha. Those girls obviously don’t know what they’re talking about, after all. Billy and Vicky?

As if.

--

“Steve!”

Nancy waves as Steve turns to look up at her, looking as if she startled him from a dazed train of thought that was only going to lead to trouble. She nods toward the door and holds up a lunch box.

“Jonathan brought stuff. Join us?”

--

“Oh. Sure.” Steve smiles, shakes his head a bit to clear it of the silly chatter he’s just heard. Billy and Vicky Marsden? That was *months* ago. Those girls must be confused.

He follows Nancy outside, and sees Jonathan sitting on a bench. Only feels a little guilty when he sees Jonathan’s wary face once he sees him. “Hey, man,” he greets him, feeling sheepish. “Sorry about Monday. I wasn’t having the greatest time after all that shit.”

--

Jonathan shrugs.

“It’s alright, I get it,” he says, moving over a little to let Nancy sit, Steve on her other side. “I shouldn’t have said that stuff anyway.

About you being… y'know. It's not my business, and it's just a stupid rumor anyway. So," he indicates the food Nancy's handing over, splitting between them. "Peace offering."

--

"Mmmmh. Okay." Steve can feel Nancy's eyes on him, so he concentrates on the food, sandwiches Jonathan probably slapped together at home, a couple of twinkies, some carrots and apples, a few slices of pie. Nothing extravagant, but compared to the cafeteria, a goddamn feast. Nancy is still looking at him when he glances up at her, though. Dammit.

"So, you guys coming to the game on Friday?" he asks, just to have something to say. School sports are neither Nancy's thing nor Jonathan's, but, well. It would be nice to have some familiar faces in the stands, not just assholes who want to see him and Billy in the same space, after what happened on Monday.

--

Nancy wasn't planning on it, but—

"Yeah!" she nods, and only belatedly thinks to glance at Jonathan for support. "Of course!"

"I love basketball," Jonathan agrees not particularly convincingly, but he's trying.

Nancy takes a bite of an apple and smiles at Steve.

"Who're you playing this time?"

—

"Northern," Steve shrugs, trying to make it sound less of a big deal. Last game of the season, and against their big nemesis, too. Last time they played Northern, he was still on top of his game, scored the winning shots no less. This time he can count himself happy if Coach Fillmer doesn't bench him. Especially since he missed practice already once this week (and isn't feeling too keen on going today, either).

Nancy's encouraging smile feels good though. Maybe she remembers the last time they played Northern, too.

He's feeling better than he has all week after this lunch, and decides to brave practice after all. Maybe it's better to show everyone that he isn't going to jump Billy's bones as soon as they are within two feet of each other.

Billy isn't there yet when everybody changes into their training clothes, and a couple of the guys surrounding Tommy H are whispering and shoot Steve surreptitious looks. Fuck those idiots. They were already ragging on him before Billy ever came to Hawkins, the only thing that has changed is their tune.

When Billy's name comes up, he listens a little more closely, though.

"... Hargrove, really?"

"Nah, no way. Besides, he's going with Vicky M now, isn't he? Heard they were seen banging in the arcade parking lot."

"Wasn't that before Christmas?"

"No, man, Carol said that Heather said Vicky and him were at the mall together last night until it closed. She saw them making out outside the Dairy Queen!"

"*Dude*… no way!"

They all suddenly fall silent and Steve realises too late why. Billy has stomped in and is getting changed, mouth set in a grim, hard line.

"Come on, you ninnies! What's taking so long? Move it!"

One annoyed shout by the door from their coach, and suddenly he and Billy are the only ones left in the locker room. Steve knows he shouldn't, but he can't help but smile at Billy. "Hey."

—

Billy nearly jumps out of his skin at the sound of Steve's voice addressing him. He glances around them in a mild panic, but they're

alone. *Fuck.* He hurries to get dressed, turning away from Steve as if *that* will prevent him from staring.

“Hey,” he grunts back.

--

“You okay?” Steve asks quietly, and Billy only shrugs, as if to say, sure, why wouldn’t I be. He’s nearly dressed now, gets up from the bench, and Steve realizes that this is all he’s gonna get out of Billy now. Bends his head.

But before Billy can move past him, he looks up. “Did you hear what people are saying? About you and Vicky Marsden?“ He smiles, tries to treat it like a joke.

—

Billy glances at Steve with a raised eyebrow. *Is he joking, or does he really not get what’s happening?*

“Yeah I *heard*,” Billy says, shouldering his locker closed. “Let’s get out there before they start talking about *us* again.”

--

Huh. Steve doesn’t quite get it at first, but when it hits him that it must have been *Billy* who started the rumors about him and Vicky, he feels like slapping his forehead for being so dumb. He gets up and smiles, mutters, “I’ll go first,” which makes sense since Billy came in last. While joining the others running laps, he muses on what he has just heard. Of *course* it must have been Billy who first started that kind of shit. Probably has been planning it since Monday. And the high school grapevine being what it is…

He can’t help but smile, being a little proud of how smart Billy can be. And almost feels bad, because when Billy called him the other day, he probably thought Steve would take this whole gossip thing really hard? He had sounded so broken up about it all. Steve wants to reassure him, but can’t think how, other than playing his best during practice. Hopefully Billy will take one look at him and *know* he isn’t mad about Billy starting that rumor.

—

Billy doesn't look at Steve when he first makes it out onto the court. Not through the extra push ups he has to do for being late, or the whole of the pre-practice huddle. It isn't until they're in the swing of things that he glances up and Steve is in his line of sight, staring back of him, and… winking? Billy quickly looks away again, but spends the rest of the quarter trying to figure out what in the world Harrington is thinking. It isn't until coach compliments him on a feint that he makes the connection.

Steve thinks he started the rumors. With words. *Shit.* He'd been a bit concerned about how Steve would handle learning about his deal with her already, but now it's going to be twice as bad when he figures it out. Because now he's had the false confidence of thinking Billy figured out a way to do this without making it hurt. Poor, naive boy. Billy hardly looks up for the rest of practice, just to avoid making eye contact with Steve again. He plays horribly, and coach rails him for it, but one of the guys who's dating the girl who played Mary in the school's nativity play points out that in theatre it's considered good luck to have a bad dress-rehearsal.

Billy is pretty sure that doesn't apply to sports, and coach seems to agree, but Billy appreciates the sentiment anyway.

--

Billy's master plan seems to work a charm. Several times on Thursday Steve hears people allude to him and Vicky. Maybe Billy has been overdoing it a bit, though? Steve pulls a face when he overhears a couple of girls mooning over Billy and Vicky getting matching bracelets at the Mall. *As if Billy would ever do sappy stuff like that.* After the way he laughed at Steve just for getting him flowers that one time?

He still thinks Billy's idea works well, but faced with the prospect of hearing this kind of drivel every day for the next three weeks, ugh. Steve fervently wishes Spring Break was over already.

So on Thursday after school, he's ready to leave the cesspit of a school behind as quickly as possible, not even trying to catch a

glimpse of Billy in the hallways after class. But when he gets to his car, Nancy is already waiting for him.

“Oh, hey,” he greets her, ducking his head. It’s stupid, but he feels kinda sheepish over the whole Vicky thing, on Billy’s behalf. Who knows what kind of shit Nancy heard about him, with people spinning everything out of proportion.

—

“Jonathan had to take Will for some tests, so I told him I’d see if I could get a ride home with you,” Nancy explains quickly, standing up from the bumper of his car as he approaches. “You’re not busy, are you?”

--

“No, I can give you a ride, sure,” he says, and actually walks around the car to open the door for her. It feels good still having Nancy to talk to, now that he’s just so much thin air to Billy, for all intents and purposes. Steve realizes with a little pang how lonely he is. It didn’t feel that bad before Billy, somehow.

He gets in the car and takes it out of the parking lot, heading towards the Wheelers’ house.

—

Steve looks better than he did on Wednesday, but still troubled. Although the rumor mill has largely moved on from Steve Harrington’s Minor Gay Moment, there’s still snickers when he enters a room, and occasional name-calling from the more determined assholes with something to prove. Nancy turns on the radio to a station they both like, and takes his little smile at that to heart.

“How’s your mom?” she asks, because her first instinct - to make small talk about college applications and test scores - would likely make him only more uncomfortable. Nancy feels bad she hasn’t been there to help him get that sorted out before it’s too late, even if it’s no longer her job. Never really was.

--

“She’s fine,” Steve shrugs. He wishes he could say his mother asks about Nancy, but it isn’t true. She never really did understand how serious they were. Well. How serious he was about Nancy, anyway.

“How’s *your* mom?” he asks, and has to grin at that. Karen Wheeler never seemed to like him much. It seems funny in retrospect.

—

Nancy shrugs. She tries not to see her mom as much as possible these days. Karen seems increasingly dissatisfied with just being her parent, and wants to be Nancy’s *friend* now too, inviting her to “girls nights” and “shopping sprees” which are equally horrendous and depressing.

“She’s, y’know, *my mom*,” Nancy says, and Steve smirks. She misses talking to someone who gets it. As lovely as Jonathan’s relationship with his family is, his attitude toward his own mother makes her feel distinctly like a spoiled brat. Which might be accurate, but she’s working through that.

They make it to the house, and Steve pulls up at the path to the door with a soft “well…” like he’s expecting her to send him away now. Probably plans to spend the rest of the day watching TV alone. Nancy’s not having that.

“Why don’t you come inside for a bit?” she offers. “We’ve got pasta salad mom made last night…” She smiles because she knows Steve could never resist her mom’s pasta salad.

--

Steve almost declines, because what if Billy decides to call, and he’s not there? Then he realises how pathetic that sounds, and what a boring afternoon he might be facing, nailed to that phone again. “Sure,” he says, smiles. “I’ll take some of that off your hands, if you absolutely insist, you know.”

He gets out of the car with her and carries her books to the door for her, smiling sheepishly when she raises her eyebrows at him. “Sorry,” he mutters. “Old habits.”

This brings back memories, he realizes when he follows Nancy inside.

Of afternoons making out on that couch when they were alone. Or studying at the dining room table. The thoughts make him a little wistful. Would Billy study with him at the dining room table? Not that he'll ever be invited.

—

Karen is in the backyard with Holly when they come in the front door, so Nancy grabs the pasta and two forks from the kitchen, and nods for Steve to follow her up to her room. It doesn't occur to her until he shuffles into her room looking a little out of place and awkward that this might not be somewhere he feels particularly comfortable being anymore. But she decides to work that to her advantage. Maybe this will help her sniff out what's really going on with him. She puts the radio on - mm *The Romantics* - and sits cross legged on her bed, offering him a fork.

"So," she says. "How're *you*?"

--

Oh no, Steve thinks, realizing too late that it's gonna be one of those conversations. And he's walked right into it, eyes wide open. Should have been suspicious as soon as Nancy mentioned pasta salad.

"Fine," he shrugs, starting to pick at the food, though his appetite has vanished. He feels bad, lying to Nancy, especially since she probably knows he is lying. But what can he tell her? *I'm in love with Billy Hargrove, haha, imagine that, and it's really hard?* As if.

—

"I saw the graffiti on your locker the other day… and Jonathan had to chase off some douchebag thinking of leaving another present on your car this morning," Nancy says, taking a bite of pasta. She chews her lip and glances up at Steve. "But none of that is what's really getting to you. Is it? Something else about this is getting to you, Steve."

--

"Nance," Steve sighs, still wondering how he got himself in this

situation. But still wanting so badly to talk to someone. Only he can't, he promised to Billy, and he has broken so many promises already.

"You wanna know something, just ask, alright?" He can't just come out and say it, but maybe he can help her stumble into some sort of truth somehow.

—

Nancy sighs, and glances over at the empty spot on the wall where she used to have pictures of her and Steve when they were dating. She shakes her head and sets her jaw, looking back at him.

"Are they right about you?" she asks. "Are you…" she shrugs, still not quite understanding how it would work, but really wanting to, "gay now?"

--

"Nancy!" Steve scoffs, shocked by how she goes right for the throat, even though he *told* her to, good god, he should have just kept his mouth shut.

"Well, are you?" she insists. He puts down his fork and wonders if it would be faster to leave through the house or just climbing down the drainpipe. But Nancy, maybe sensing his flight reflex, puts her hand on his arm. Dammit.

"I'm not, I'm not *gay*!" he gives back fervently, "Are you *kidding me?* You don't think *I* was the one faking it when we were together? 'Cause that is just—" He shakes his head, angry at the thought.

—

"No," Nancy says firmly. "I'm not saying that, Steve, I know you weren't--" She feels guilt about that, all of that, still. But that's why she has to press him now. She knows he's hiding something, she just isn't sure what, and she wants to help with whatever it is. "Just… You know you can talk to me, right?" *God*, she sounds like her mother. But it's true.

--

“Alright,” Steve says, looking down at the hand on his sleeve. He feels stupid and mean. Snapping at Nancy just because *he* doesn’t have his shit together? Not good.

“Sorry,” he says, and means it. “I just don’t… after what happened this week—” He swallows, tries to gather his thoughts, tries to talk past the sinking feeling in his stomach. How come he and Nancy have faced down actual monsters together, and talking about this shit is actually more scary?

“I like both, ok?” he blurts out. “I didn’t know before, but I know now. I like girls, and boys too. Maybe. I think. No, I’m sure. Yeah.”

—

Nancy is silent for a moment. Processing. Only when Steve looks up at her with fear in his eyes does she realize she’s expected to say something.

“Oh,” she starts. And his shoulders hunch. Okay, not good. “Oh,” she says again, but this time it’s more positive, she hopes. More accepting. She meets his eyes and smiles. Squeezes his arm a little so he knows she’s still there with him on purpose. “So does that mean…” she trails off, not really sure where she’s going with that, what question to ask first.

--

“I don’t know what it means,” he admits, shrugging. “I just, when people say that stuff about gay shit now, I can’t pretend that’s not about me. Because it kinda is.”

He looks up at her, a little hopeful because she’s at least there, still trying to understand. “So… you don’t mind?”

—

Nancy frowns and shakes her head, biting her bottom lip.

“No, Steve, of course I don’t *mind,*” she shrugs. “You’re still Steve.” She smiles fondly. “You’re still an idiot. So it’s a good thing you told *me* so I can help keep your secret. Does anyone else know?”

--

“Well, Jonathan seems to have caught on, though I’ve no idea how,” Steve says, frowning. “And of course—”

Don’t you say it, Billy’s voice warns him. *Don’t you dare.*

He shrugs, swallows. Shakes his head. “You’re the only one I’ve told.”

—

Nancy nods slowly. It seems like Steve is still hiding something, but after a reveal like what he just gave her, she’s willing to stand down on this one. “He’s good like that,” she says of Jonathan. “He picks up on things.”

It feels weird to talk about him with Steve. That guilt comes back, although if she’s honest it never *really* goes away. She takes a bite of the pasta salad between them just to do something.

“Well lucky for you, the Hawkins rumor mill seems to be mostly obsessed with Vicky’s newest fling now, though I can’t imagine why. I swear, she’s with a different guy every month at least. She’s gonna run out soon.”

--

“Yeah that’s, that’s real lucky,” Steve mumbles, reaching for the pasta salad. He swallows, hard, and it feels like the salad is made of glue all of a sudden.

“Listen, Nance,” he starts, and she looks up at him, so honest and open. It would be so easy to tell her about Billy now.

“There’s a guy,” he says, and even admitting that much feels like betraying Billy. But is it so bad, if he doesn’t tell her his name?

“A guy I, well. Kinda like.”

—

Nancy chews slowly, eyes on Steve careful. She nods wordlessly,

encouraging him to continue without contributing anything herself that might spook him or scare him off now.

--

“I don’t know,” Steve shrugs, “It’s all kinda stupid, and I’m pretty bad at it all. Like the whole secrecy thing? I really suck at it.”

He starts picking at the comforter on Nancy’s bed, just to give his hands something to do. “I mean, I’m not used to having to hide who I really really like.” He shrugs. Wants to tell her how much it *sucks*.

—

Nancy smiles. Because just talking about this guy is making Steve get a little more animated. Come back to himself a bit. It’s subtle, but she knows what to look for. And it’s good to see him not quite so shrouded in gloom. And on top of that…

“You just went from ‘kinda like’ to ‘really really like’ in about five seconds,” she points out a little teasingly, nudging his knee with her socked foot. “He must be *some* guy,” she says honestly.

--

“He *is*,” Steve admits, and has to smile, because, fuck, it feels good to finally tell someone. And of course Nancy of all people would notice how smitten he is, how completely and irretrievably gone. “He’s, god, Nance. He’s so—” He doesn’t even have words, at least none that don’t make him sound like a teenage girl. *Dreamy*, he wants to say. *He makes my knees weak just by looking at me.*

—

It’s nice to see Steve like this about somebody else, somebody who might like him back the way he deserves. But it also hurts. Because she remembers how quickly he’d advanced from fooling around, flirting with her and kissing her like it was a joke, to wanting to be with her all the time and smiling like that whenever he saw her coming near. She worries for his heart.

But she knows how he’d react if she told that to him. So instead she

hugs her knees to her chest and gets comfortable, looking at him expectantly.

“Tell me,” she says. “Tell me all about the kind of guy who’s turned Steve Harrington’s head.” And then, because she can see the unsure look in his eyes at that, “No names, obviously, this isn’t gossip. It’s just harmless boy talk,” she explains. “Maybe I can give you some advice,” she laughs. “God knows you don’t want to make the same mistakes I’ve made.”

--

“What, wouldn’t your advice just be like, don’t date Steve Harrington?” he asks, eyebrows raised, but that feels mean just as it leaves his mouth. He takes her hand to show her he didn’t mean it in a bad way.

“He’s, well. He’s gorgeous, for one. And smart.” Steve has to smile. Describing Billy means getting to think about him, in detail, and saying it out loud. It feels kinda wild. “And strong, but not just like, physically. And he does this thing with his tongue, when he thinks no one’s looking…” It makes him flush a bit, just imagining it. “I think he’s really sad, sometimes, but he tries not to show it…”

--

Nancy flushes a little when Steve says the tongue thing. It suddenly *really* hits her that they’re talking about a *guy* that Steve is clearly *really into*. She just shakes her head a little bemusedly and tries to ignore the voice in her head that’s crossing Hawkins High boys off a mental list as Steve narrows the playing-field down with his dreamy description.

By the end of it, though, she’s got nothing, except that he’s kind of described himself. She honestly can’t think of a single other guy at school who fits the bill. Nancy takes his hand in hers and gives it a little squeeze.

“Sounds like you have pretty good taste in guys,” she says softly. “Just… be careful, okay? I don’t want to see you hurt again. And I know,” she rolls her eyes at herself, “I’m one to talk, but seriously,

Steve, if you ever need to… anything… I'm here. Jonathan would be too. If you want to tell him. I'm sure he would."

--

"Right," Steve nods, though telling Jonathan, no way. They get along pretty well, considering everything that went down, but, no. Telling Nancy about liking guys is one thing. Telling Jonathan is something else. What if Jonathan starts to think Steve's coming on to him, or something? No way. It would be weird. "I don't really want to, I mean, I'm sure he's cool. But. Well."

He puts down his fork. "I think I'm gonna head home now, alright?" He doesn't want it to look like he's running away, because he really is grateful that Nancy is taking it all so well. But there's still so much he can't say and wants to. Better to get out before he accidentally lets Billy's name slip out and fucks up again, for the second time in one week.

Before he gets up, he squeezes her hand once more. "Thanks, Nance. For everything." Before things can get too mushy, he adds, "You guys are still coming to the game tomorrow, right?"

--

Nancy nods and stands to walk him out.

"Wouldn't miss it," she promises. "We'll be there. And I'll keep your secret," she assures him, making a show of locking her lips up and tossing an imaginary key over her shoulder.

--

Steve can't help smiling at that, and leans in to kiss her cheek before he turns to leave. He almost has a bounce in his step now, it feels like there's a load off his chest somehow, even though he hardly told Nancy anything. But she knows now, really knows what's been eating him lately, and it feels so good. The light feeling stays with him for the rest of the day, follows him even to sleep. The day of the big game he wakes up well-rested and almost content.

--

Billy can feel the rest of the team's eyes on him and Steve as they get ready at their neighboring lockers - so close yet so fucking distant - and Billy internally curses the stupid alpha-male posturing bullshit that made him single King Steve out at the beginning of the school year and pick the empty locker right next to his just to fuck with him.

He's buzzing with nerves for the importance of the game, but more than that his skin is itching with how much it craves Steve's touch after only a week. It's not like they haven't gone this long before, but somehow this week has been infinitely worse. Touching someone else, knowing he can't have Steve alone until this all blows over, knowing it's *his* arbitrary rule that they can't, and that if he asked Steve to meet somewhere he probably would in a heartbeat… Billy turns the energy coursing through him onto Tommy, for lack of a better target. Gives him a healthy slap on the shoulder.

"You ready, Hayward?" he hollers. "Let's go kick some Northern ass!!"

"Play fair, Hargrove," Coach warns from across the locker room. "This isn't practice, this is the championship game. I *will* bench your ass rather than see you disgrace this team."

Billy waves him off.

The game starts with a bang. Mostly because the energy in Billy's bones demands to be used, and he's committing personal fouls almost from the fucking whistle. But after the second in one *quarter*, Coach makes good on his word and calls for a substitution. Billy for Steve.

As he passes on his way to the bench, Billy gives Steve a smirk that *could* be that of a teammate to another teammate, but resists the urge to touch him in any way - even a thump on the shoulder - because he knows it'll be like a drug. He won't want to stop there. Steve returns the comradely look and glances away, careful. *Good job, baby. See, you can be good at this.* Billy thinks even as he feels a pang of longing for those eyes to linger.

—

Watching the game has been agony, because it meant Steve could

watch Billy every second without looking suspicious, and man, he never looks better than when he kicks ass on the court. But Billy is too high-strung, goes too hard at the other team, and it's only a matter of time before Coach Fillmer penalizes him for it. Steve is glad that he's the sub for Billy now. Sitting next to him on the bench would have been awful.

He tries to get his head into the game, and for awhile, it works, the team is coming together. He manages to score a few points and is actually feeling rather good about himself when a foul from the other team knocks him on his ass, the other guy's elbow to his windpipe leaving him on the floor, blinking, wondering what happened. The ref must have been looking the other way, because the game runs on around him, and for a moment Steve has trouble just getting up. One of his team mates lends a hand and he stumbles to his feet, grimacing.

--

Billy's on the edge of his seat. Furious. About to yell at the ref or go out and help Steve up himself, when some kid from their team Billy's never noticed reaches down and gives Harrington a hand up. Billy jogs his left leg restlessly and grinds his teeth at the seeming lack of concern shown by Coach Fillmer from the sidelines.

"Hey Billy, looks like your boyfriend isn't doin' too hot," a familiar too-sultry voice says from behind him in the stands. It feels much too good to hear someone else refer to Steve as his *boyfriend*, even if he knows she means it derisively. Just then, the ball comes back to Steve and he scores, throwing the Hawkins crowd into a frenzy.

"Are people still calling him that?" Billy asks over his shoulder unconcernedly. "Hm maybe we oughtta put on our own half-time show. Give 'em something real to talk about."

--

Vicky laughs out loud, and Steve looks up at the sound just as the whistle ends the first quarter. He can't see more than a mop of teased dark hair before the team gathers in a huddle, but he knows who that is. All the boys in Hawkins High know who that is. Her name is

inscribed above way too many urinals not to.

Still, that doesn't have to mean anything. She probably comes to every game. Steve's just never noticed before. He manages to pull himself together when the whistle blows again, even starts feeling kinda good about the game after landing a couple of good shots. He can't hear if Billy is cheering him on, not exactly. But then Billy wouldn't, probably. Not after Monday.

—

"Why are we here again?"

"*Jonathan*," Nancy chides, elbowing him in the side. And then, because she realizes it does maybe need some explaining: "Because we're his only friends now, or close enough, and after everything this week…"

"Being called a queer…" Jonathan provides a little tiredly. And he has a point. He's been called the same and worse since middle school, and never had anyone - much less his ex girlfriend and her new boyfriend - to support him through it. But Nancy doesn't back down. She gives him an imperious look and sighs.

"Being called… that… for--" She frowns around them and lowers her voice, "for pretty valid reasons," she says vaguely. Jonathan gives her a slightly curious look, but doesn't press her, for which she's infinitely grateful. "And the other guy involved in the whole scandal is…" She grimaces down at the bench, where Billy's leaning into the stands a bit with a shit-eating grin on his face as he trades barbs with Vicky Marsden. Nancy resists the urge to roll her eyes, and turns back to Jonathan. "He needs us, okay? And besides. We do owe him," she points out.

Someone makes a basket or something, and the crowd on their side of the stands goes wild. Nancy glances around quickly and finds Steve on the court. Smiles and flashes him a thumbs up.

--

Steve hardly notices Nancy and Jonathan on the stands now. What

catches his eye when he looks over to the sidelines every so often is Billy, talking to Vicky. At first he thinks it's a trick of the light, but no. Billy and Vicky are still talking, laughing, the next time he looks, and the next. Can it be a coincidence?

He fumbles a shot directly after he sees Vicky touch Billy's shoulder. It *has* to be a coincidence.

"Stop looking at your *boyfriend*, Harrington," Tommy is suddenly beside him, grinds out the words from between clenched teeth. "We got a fuckin' game to win here, come *on*!"

That just blows Steve's concentration to bits. Luckily, the half-time whistle saves him. He jogs over to the bench with the other players, confused and bothered. Grabs a drink to distract himself. Then he makes the mistake of looking over to Billy once more.

—

Vicky's the one to initiate it - her hand pulling him in by the clean, rarely-used jersey - but he doesn't resist. Pretends he's just as into it as she is, swiping his tongue over her lips in a fashion that doesn't make for a particularly *good* kiss, but does make for an eye-catching one. He reaches a hand over the back of the bench and goes for Vicky's left tit with a smirk. She gasps over-loud and pulls away, slapping his hand, but from the delight in her eyes she's loving it.

The male half of the crowd universally seems to approve. The female half is largely jealous. But Billy just wants to turn around and look at the only onlooker who really matters. Right now none of the eyes on him matter as much as the big brown pair he knows are just behind him. Is Steve mad? Is he hurting? Oh god, is he being obvious? *Shit,* Billy thinks to himself. *This was a bad time to do this.*

"Hargrove, get your ass over here!"

Suddenly Billy wants nothing less than to turn around and look at Steve. But now he has to. He gives Vicky one last wink and turns, fucking with his hair a bit to excuse the fact he's keeping his eyes on the team's scuffed shoes. He finds Steve's shiny new ones easily, and turns his gaze upward again, making a point not to look in Steve's

direction at all.

“Yeah yeah, coach, I’m here. What’re we doing?”

--

If the coach is saying anything, like, actual *words*, Steve doesn’t hear them over the rushing sound in his ears. He tries to catch Billy’s eye, needs to get that much nonverbal conversation at least, to know what the *fuck* he thinks he’s doing. The talk around him sounds like the wah-wah trombone in a cartoon, and everything is speeding up, like Steve is the slow one, standing still, dumbfounded, and the world around him just spins.

What the fuck? he wants to ask Billy, *what the fuck was that?* It wasn’t a mistake, or a trick of the light, Steve knows that, as much as his brain would like to believe it. It wasn’t even a private moment overlooked. Billy did it on purpose, Billy put on a fucking show.

Fucking hell. The whole rumor thing. What if it wasn’t a *rumor* at all, what if Billy’s actually been dating Vicky, like everyone’s been saying?

Billy isn’t looking at him, won’t meet Steve’s eyes even for a moment, and it makes Steve want to drag him off to the sides, away from everyone else, just to get him to fucking *look* at him.

Then the whistle goes and Steve’s stupor is no longer self-contained, people bump into him, push against him, what the fuck is happening? It isn’t until one of his team mates bodily pushes him towards the center court that he remembers they have a fucking game going on.

--

Billy presses back into the center of the fray as soon as coach is done reminding him where his head should be. Needs it. Needs the focus on something other than his goddamn love life. Sex life. Whatever. He scores, and helps Tommy to score in quick succession, and feels on top of the world as their score levels out with that of the bitches from Northern. For a glorious moment he forgets the crowd. Forgets the drama of his life.

“Harrington!” he shouts on instinct, spotting the only teammate with an open shot and reaching around the boulder of a boy trying to block him to throw the ball. But time slows down when their eyes meet, and suddenly Billy remembers the crowd. Becomes painfully aware of it, and of Steve’s reason for staring at him as if through several feet of glass. Billy can tell that it’s only years of training at that moment that allow Steve to catch the hastily thrown ball in both hands.

—

Steve stares at Billy, stupidly holding the ball in his hands, until their eye contact is broken by members of the other team, advancing menacingly, and his own team, trying to get him to pass. People yell, and Steve stares. Nearly drops the ball when one of the Northerners makes a swipe for it, barely manages to hold on to it, but then the shrill whistle of the referee breaks up his haze, passes the ball to the other team. Steve is left standing, staring after Billy, who naturally moved towards the rest of the game, where the action is.

“Harrington! Get your head out of your ass!” someone shouts at him, and he nearly laughs. What the fuck is even happening here? Is the rest of the world in some other dimension he can’t see? Who cares about the fucking game?

--

Nancy frowns, staring down at the game as Steve seems to lose the thread of what’s happening, and is buffeted to the side.

“What is he doing?” she asks of no one in particular. But Jonathan answers anyway.

“He looks distracted,” he says simply, “Distracted by Max’s step-brother.”

For a second Nancy can’t hear herself think for all the noise in the gym. She lets out a little gasp before she even fully registers it. And then,

“Billy,” she mutters.

“Yeah, whatever,” Jonathan agrees dismissively.

No, Billy, Nancy wants to say. *Steve is in love with Billy Hargrove*. But she promised. And if it’s true, that’s definitely not the kind of secret Steve would want getting out to anyone. Hell, even if *he* did, *she* wouldn’t want that secret getting out. *Oh my god, I told him he had good taste! What was I thinking?*

But it fits too well.

“He’s gorgeous, and smart, and strong, but not just like, physically… The thing he does with his tongue… The thing he does with his hair… I think he’s really sad, sometimes, but he tries not to show it…”

Billy hollers expletives at a kid on the other team for nearly fowling him. Looks like he’d actually rip him apart if given the chance. Nancy feels her heart sink. So much for Steve not getting his heart broken again.

“I hope he gets out of this slump before the game ends,” Jonathan chews his lip, following Steve down the court easily - he’s hardly moving. “People are going to notice.”

Nancy glances around them at the stands, and sees that he’s right. She frowns down at Steve too, and on a whim cups her hands around her mouth and yells: “*COME ON, STEVE! WOO!! YOU'VE GOT THIS!!”* She‘s almost completely drowned out by the rest of the crowd when someone makes a shot, but Jonathan gives her a little smile and joins in too after a moment.

“*COME ON, KING STEVE! KICK THEIR ASS!”*

—

The cheers from the crowd don’t actually make it through to Steve’s brain, but one thing does. King Steve. What Billy used to call him. God, how he hates that fucking title. The game is ebbing on around him and he is dimly aware that the other team are pulling ahead again, effectively one man stronger on the court. He can’t seem to give a fuck.

“Harrington!”

Coach Fillmer's face is red, livid, and Steve realises he's being substituted. He trots off the court while his sub runs to fill his place, intent on damage control. Steve sits down on the bench, breathing hard. Watches his team numbly. Billy is still playing, like there is nothing else. Scores, cheers, yells. Steve feels like he's been kicked in the head. Has he been kicked in the head? Nothing seems to make sense anymore.

Then Vicky Marsden yells, "Go, Billy! Knock 'em dead!" from the sidelines, and Steve feels like he's going to be sick.

--

Billy grimaces when Steve is benched. Feels disgust in his throat when the rest of the team jeers him off the court. These ungrateful bitches. He plays the rest of the game *in spite of them*. Passes only enough not to be called out on it, but always gets it back quickly because the whole team knows he's the one who's gonna win this. By the end of the third quarter he's drenched in sweat and barely breathing, but he sits down on the bench and instantly feels a bit better. Somebody hands him water and he downs it. Only then does he become consciously aware of the boy to his right on the bench and realize why sitting down helped him so. *Steve.*

They can't interact here. Not the way he wants to do. But Billy presses his thigh up against Steve's needily, and breathes a little easier at the contact. And even though he tenses noticeably, Steve seems too stunned to pull away. Play is resumed after much too short a huddle, near the bench so their star player can have a moment, and Billy's thrown back into the action.

He's vaguely aware of cheers from the stands, but the boos and hisses from the Northern bleachers are what really fuel him. At the beginning of the last quarter he makes a round, jeering right back at them and raising his arms to encourage their hatred. *Bring it on, assholes, it's not even half of what I deserve.*

--

"Pilgar, move your feet! Get down that line!" The coach interrupts his heated tirade to shoot Steve a hard look. "Harrington. I don't care

what the hell you do in your time off, you and Hargrove can paint each other's nails for all I care. Can you stop having your time of the month and just go out there to play the game?"

Steve stares at the man. Hates him with a burning passion all of a sudden. Hates the way he talks about them. Hates that he knows the coach would dismiss Billy as a *fag* if he didn't play like he does, almost single-handedly pulling their team ever closer to the win. Hates that this man thinks he knows even the first thing about Billy, or himself, or what they mean to each other.

"I can play," he grinds out between clenched teeth, and *fuck it*. He is going to fucking wipe the floor with whatever Coach Fillmer thinks he knows.

—

"Substitution!"

Everyone looks to Coach Fillmer in disbelief. Northern's coach actually has to stop himself from laughing when Fillmer nods for Steve to sub in for Tommy Pilgar. Billy glances over at Steve. Gives him a smile probably just this side of too lustful and encouraging and *in love* for the court, but fuck it. It's the last quarter. Everyone's a bit loopy, right? He can be excused one *look*.

When play resumes, Steve is one of the first with the ball after the other team misses a shot. He runs down the court and for a second it's like looking in a mirror. Steve is playing rough. Playing like *him*. But Billy can't just stand there and stare for long before he realizes Steve's going to need help down on Northern's end of the court. Billy rushes in and positions himself to be open if Steve needs it, but Steve goes for the hoop on his own, and makes it in. Billy grins when their eyes lock for a second.

The air is still tense between them, Steve's expression more angrily determined than it has any right to be from gameplay alone, but it's not out of place in the rest of the team. The scores are tied, and the countdown clock is beginning to look a bit threatening. And what Billy cares about now, is that Steve is playing with him. They're running the Hawkins offence and it's like a taste of how things were

in the beginning. The rush of working together like this that made Billy begin to fall for him in the first place.

By the last 10 seconds of the game it's like it's them against Northern, and they're wiping the court with their asses. Steve and Billy pass back and forth up the court, ignoring the Northern coach's protests, and just before the whistle blows for the end of the game, Billy aims and makes it into Northern's hoop one last time, throwing them over the line. Hawkins wins!

The crowd goes wild, and the team whoops, coming over to clap him on the back, but Billy just turns to grin at Steve. Then turns again, and frowns. He can't find him anywhere. He glances over the heads of this team mates, and sees Steve disappearing into the locker room. *Oh yeah,* he thinks. *Shit.*

--

Steve has never needed anything more than just to get away, get the fuck away from Billy and the team loudly cheering themselves on. He rushes through the locker room, out of his sweaty clothes and into his normal ones without even taking a shower, the sweat from the game still making him feel tacky and gross, but he doesn't care, doesn't look left or right, just wants to be out of there before the others come back.

He slips out on the other side just as the first boys come in, boisterous and full of themselves. Outside, there are still spectators everywhere, scattering towards the parking lot. Maybe he can make a quiet escape?

"Steve?" The voice stops him dead in his tracks, one of only two who might. He swallows, closes his eyes before he turns. Tries to smile at Nancy, Jonathan by her side. It comes out more like a grimace.

"Hey. You made it," he says, voice a little hoarse. *Fuck.* He really wishes Nancy of all people hadn't been here to see all that shit.

—

"Yeah, of course," Nancy smiles hesitantly. Steve looks awful, despite

the rush of just winning a close game. She steps closer and puts a hand on his sweaty shoulder. “Hey, you wanna go get ice cream or something with us? Celebrate the win?” *Talk about what the hell’s going on with you and Billy Hargrove?*

—

Steve looks down, shakes his head. Wants to be gone with every fiber of his being, only her touching his shoulder is keeping him there. Wishes he could hug her. Fuck, but how much he wishes he could.

“No, I— I better get home,” he mutters, and just then someone else claps his back. He flinches, but it’s not Billy. Of course it isn’t. *Stupid.*

“Harrington, great game, man. Don’t forget, after party at Tina’s, right?”

“Right,” Steve says, and means, *fuck off*.

Nancy looks like she’s about to say something else, and he can’t dealwith that now, knows it’ll be something sympathetic, but really, he just wants to be *gone*. The others might be back any minute now.

“See you Monday,” he mutters, giving her hand a brief squeeze before pushing it off and turning to leave. *Run away, Stevie-boy, that’s right, run away!*

Notes for the Chapter:

> Billy and Nancy POVs by ficsandfuckery (women-seem-wicked on tumblr), Steve POV by blithesea (bites-heal on tumblr).

3. I'd Rather Go Blind

Summary for the Chapter:

What the fuck is Billy doing? Steve has to find out.

How he actually gets home, Steve doesn't remember after the fact. But the house is blissfully dark and quiet when he gets there, his parents out weekending somewhere. Of course they'd do that *now*. Now that he doesn't actually need the house to himself anymore.

Steve strips out of his clothes on the way upstairs and starts drowning himself under the shower. The hot water feels good, but Steve feels worse with every minute, reliving the memory of Billy and Vicky at half-time. The way they kissed. Like it was nothing. Like they do it every day. Fucking hell.

He shivers, turns the heat of the water up until it's nearly scalding. He knows that was a fucking show. Put on for all of the school to see how much Billy Hargrove digs girls. He even understands why Billy did it, but the shock of seeing the two together like that, out of the blue— but was it really that out of the blue? With all the rumors flying around, shouldn't he have fucking known that people weren't going to assume stuff just on a hunch and a few whispered words? Something Billy said on the phone replays in his head. "*Whatever happens...*"

Billy *planned* this, he realizes with a sick lurch to his stomach. Maybe already had it in mind when they talked in the bathroom on Monday. Certainly was already thinking about it when he called on Tuesday night. He has been planning this for days, and not warned Steve with so much as a fucking word. And then Steve remembers another conversation on the phone, a lifetime ago. *I don't date chicks, I just fuck them sometimes, if I need to.* He moans, suddenly feeling sick again. Billy *wouldn't*. Would he?

Not unless he needs to, his mind whispers, and now Steve realises how stupid he is, everyone is at that after party right now, and what if Billy is there, and what if he thinks just kissing a girl in front of the whole school wasn't enough to show everyone that he's not gay?

Steve quickly gets out of the shower and starts to get dressed. He has to get to that fucking party.

—

Once Billy determines that Steve's left the locker room ahead of them, snuck out through the back, he relaxes a little - knowing at least that Steve's smart enough not to tear into him here, in public. He allows the jubilation of the rest of the team to carry him a little bit as he showers and changes into street clothes, and when he finds himself with a couple teammates and their girlfriends piled into his car, heading for the unofficial after party some junior chick is throwing, he hardly thinks of it.

Good, he figures. He needs to get drunk. He *needs* to see Steve, but that's still not going to happen for a while. So he gets there with his car-load of classmates, takes a beer from somebody, and gets started on the night, doing his very best not to keep watching the crowd around him for the fluffy-haired former king of the school.

--

The sunglasses may not be the best idea for a party look this late in the day, but Steve puts them on anyway, feels like shielding himself from the sea of assholes he has to wade through to find Billy. Several people clap him on the back, yelling congratulations over the din, and the shades help to keep them at a distance. He only scans the room for Billy, isn't interested in anyone else. But no matter where he goes, he can't see him anywhere, not among the dancers, not at the keg stand, not in the kitchen where the hard liquor is making the rounds.

There's the rooms upstairs, cordoned off with a pathetic bit of string and a note saying "No party zone, assholes". He knows he should go up and check those, but the thought of it makes him feel sick and shaky. He takes a drink from some girl passing out beers, and stares at the hallway for a good minute, building up his anger and his nerve, but just when Steve makes up his mind to go up, he hears a laugh he thinks he knows, and when he turns, the feeling is confirmed. Vicky Marsden, on the dance floor, having the time of her life. It takes his mind a moment to register that Billy isn't with her.

So? That doesn't mean anything. A voice in his head reminds him. *Maybe they've already done it. Doesn't take forever.*

He still can't see Billy anywhere, and feels stupid for even trying. There are still a number of the other party-goers trying to pull him into the festivities, get him to drink with them, dance with them, and in the end, he has to escape through the back garden. That's where he finally sees Billy. Leaning against the gardening shed, in the shadows, the glow of his cigarette the only thing illuminating his silhouette. But Steve would know him anywhere.

Steve checks briefly if anyone else is around. Then he makes his way over.

—

Billy jumps when he hears the door open and close, thinking it must be Vicky wondering what's taking him so damn long. But it's *Steve.* Shit. That doesn't make things better. Suddenly he's very aware of the darkened upstairs windows that look out onto the yard, and their potential for being outed. Again.

But *fuck* does he want to touch him. Kiss him. Tell him everything is gonna be alright and he's *sorry* that he's such a shit boyfriend.

"Hey," he murmurs instead, like a fucking coward, and takes another long drag of his cigarette.

—

If there was a hint of relief over finding Billy there, alone, not entwined with Vicky in the back of his car as Steve had imagined, it's gone the moment Billy opens his mouth, doesn't even bother looking at him.

"*Hey*." Steve scoffs. "Honestly? That's all you have to say?"

--

Billy shudders. Glances up at Steve, and his face would probably be baldly pleading if it were visible in the dark out here.

“I’m sorry it had to hit you like that,” he sighs. “I didn’t mean to make out with her during the fucking *game*, she just—“ He stands up from his lean against the shed and steps closer to Steve, putting a hand out just to touch. It’s pushed away, and he drops his hand miserably. “I didn’t want you to have to see that, baby, I’m sorry…”

—

“You’re sorry I had to *see* it.” Steve can’t even keep the bitterness out of his voice now. He’s not trying to. “Yeah, that was a fucking shame, huh. When you and her… Too bad I had to be there to see that. But you couldn’t really miss that big of an audience, I bet.”

Billy makes a move then, and Steve steps back, moves further into the shadows, just to get away from him.

--

Billy frowns.

“Not that it matters, but yeah I fucking want an audience,” he growls defensively. “Are you *surprised* by that? I’m sorry, do you need a refresher on why exactly I’m stuck sucking up to Vicky fucking Marsden?”

—

The blood drains from Steve’s face when he feels all his worst suspicions confirmed. Billy has actually been doing… something or other with Vicky *all week long*. And he just admits it, like it means fucking nothing. Steve’s mind starts running a mile a minute, imagining all the things Billy *isn’t* saying.

“Oh, yeah.” Steve huffs a dry laugh, but it burns in his chest. “Let’s not forget how this is all *my* fault. I’m the idiot around here, and that makes whatever you do ok, huh? Because you just do all that to *fix my messes.*”

He has to take another deep breath, and it comes out shaky.

—

“No, I’m not saying that, Steve, *Jesus*. Can you not be a fucking *girl* about this?” Billy hisses, stepping back a bit and leaning against the shed again. “I’m not doing this to hurt you, y’know. And it’s not like I’m actually getting any pleasure from fucking around with her. I’m just doing it to save our asses from your pretty mouth. That’s *all* I’m doing!”

--

“Fucking around,” Steve echoes, he can’t help himself. He doesn’t want to know, but he has to. There’s a world of difference between that and the making out he’s had to witness. Seeing them do that in public is one thing, imagining what they get up to in private is so much worse.

“So you’ve been fucking her, too?”

—

Billy opens his mouth to refute it. To explain it. To beg that Steve try to understand. *What I’m doing with her isn’t even in the same ballpark as what I do with you.* But the words seem weak and pointless even in his own head. “Steve…” his voice sounds almost defeated. He can see Steve realizing what his silence means, and filling in the gaps with whatever his imagination can conjure. Billy crosses the distance between them again and touches Steve softly on the shoulder.

--

Steve twists out of Billy’s touch, takes a step back, his mind reeling with unbidden images of Billy and Vicky, together, *together*.

“Tonight?” he croaks.

--

“Not yet,” Billy admits. “I was just—” He shakes his head. “I don’t want her, Steve. I just want *you.* She’s nothing but a means to an end, don’t you get that? I never meant to hurt you, baby. I just want us to be safe.”

--

“How can you say that?” he asks desperately, “Not *hurt* me, did you think I’d just let you— You could just— Fucking *hell*, Bill!”

He can’t stand the thought of it. Knowing that Billy hated it makes it just worse, not better like Billy seems to think. Steve feels sickness rise in him, swallows it down.

--

Billy clenches his fists ineffectually and takes a shaky breath.

“I did it for *you*, baby,” he says. “I know it sucks, but if you’d just—”

--

“Don’t!” Steve says harshly, feeling how much he is to blame. “Don’t do that, you don’t have to—” Billy opens his mouth as if to cut in and Steve stops him. “No! It doesn’t *have* to be like that! What were you gonna do, fuck Vicky Marsden until Spring Break, are you *kidding me*?”

Billy doesn’t deny it, just looks fucking miserable, and how is Steve the asshole in this situation?

“I can’t,” he says, stops, unsure how to go on. Thinks of Billy’s mouth on Vicky again. Thinks about what Billy would do next, even though he *hates* it. Nearly retches. “It has to stop!”

—

Billy’s heart stops for a second. The cigarette butt in his hand is burning his fingers, but he doesn’t care. He bites his lip and stares at Steve until he can’t.

“Steve, what’re you saying?” he says. “You’re not-- What is this, some kind of ultimatum?”

He blinks away tears furiously, suddenly feeling much too exposed - caught naked. He wants to remind Steve what he’s saying. Remind him of the bruises on his neck. What his father’s capable of if he found out about them. He wants to fight tooth and nail to get Steve to understand why there *isn’t* a choice here. But he’s too proud. He

won't pull Steve back to him on pity alone, and if that's all that's left to him now…

Billy finds that the floodgates are harder to close once they've been opened so far, but he's been trained in this for years. In a moment he's all but shut down again. All that's left is tear stained cheeks and a hollow sort of rage burning in his chest.

"You're gonna leave me if I keep trying to save our lives? What kind of sense is that?"

--

"Save our lives," Steve scoffs, and wipes at the corner of his eyes because it's making his vision wobbly.

"So you're gonna keep fucking Vicky, until no one remembers. What if it happens again? What if someone sees us? What if—" He stops to take a shuddery breath.

"What if I fuck up again, because we both know I fucking suck at this whole secrecy thing—" Billy stares at him unblinking, and Steve flushes. "What are you gonna do, just fuck Vicky again? You want me to fuck a girl on the side, too? Huh? Give us a watertight alibi?"

He can't believe that Billy isn't even trying to dispute any of this, so he adds, "Might as well marry those girls while we're at it! Set for life!"

—

"Harrington, stop. You sound like…" he holds his head and sighs, and when he looks up again he can feel that old vicious mania taking hold of him. He smiles and his gestures get too wide. "You want me to tell you I won't marry some broad?" he asks incredulously, "right now? What, are *you* proposing? 'Cause I don't see a ring, and I'm gonna need a big fat fuckin' rock."

It's a joke. Of course it's a joke. But it's a bad one, because it just makes his stomach churn with the knowledge of what he'll never have. With Steve or with anyone else. And that's never really hit him before. It never mattered. So why the *fuck* does it hurt so much now?

--

Steve shakes his head at the way Billy is deflecting. “Are you gonna keep on doing that shit with Vicky?” he asks, hating how pleading his voice sounds, how much it’s already begging Billy not to.

“If you are, what are we even still doing here? We fuck around while you’re not busy fucking *her*? That’s fucking bullshit, and you know it.”

His throat feels sticky, almost like it wants to sabotage the next words coming out, but he squeezes past them somehow. “I don’t want to have to fucking watch that anymore. I can’t, I’m sorry. I can’t do it.”

—

Billy’s dam breaks and he can’t hold his desperation back anymore. The best thing in his life is threatening to walk out the door and leave him with nothing but his old man and Vicky fucking Marsden, and Billy’s fucked if he’s gonna just sit back and let that happen. He surges forward and presses his lips into Steve’s with a choked out groan he can’t hold back. Holds him close.

“Then don’t,” he breathes, “Just— please, Steve. Don’t leave. Don’t leave me for this.”

—

Steve shudders in Billy’s embrace, takes a moment to take stock. He knows that if he wants even a tiny chance at ending this mess, he has to walk out now. But he can’t. Billy is holding him close, and he misses that so much. He takes a deep breath, exhales slowly.

“I don’t want to,” he says, closing his eyes because they are starting to burn. “But Billy,” he opens his eyes again, pleading. “I can’t take another *day* of that, honest to god, I can’t *do it.*”

—

Billy’s chest feels like something’s trying to burst out of it. He leans his forehead against Steve’s and after a while he nods slightly.

“I’ll stop, baby. I’ll cut her off for you if you really want me to, but —”

Steve looks like he’s about to confirm again that that’s what he wants, but Billy talks over him.

“But then you have to do something too,” he says. “I’m only one half of the rumor about us, Stevie. You’ve gotta find a girl you know has had a thing for you for a while, mess around a little, enough that it gets out… and I’ll stop. It’s the only way this shit will clear up. ‘*Neither* of the fags are really fags, see? They fuck girls!’ - they’ll still talk about it sometimes, but it won’t be hot fucking gossip anymore. That’s all I need, baby.”

—

Steve frowns, wants to say no, that it’s a shitty thing to do, that he hasn’t fucked around like that since way before Nancy, that that isn’t *him*, not anymore. And Billy already did it, isn’t that enough? He knows Billy doesn’t agree, though.

“If I do that,” he says carefully, because his head is hurting with the pressure of unsaid things. “You’re not going back to Vicky, not ever?”

—

Billy pulls Steve close again. Holds him maybe a little too tight, but Steve doesn’t complain. He breathes in the scent of his shampoo and nods once.

“Yeah,” he says. “Just do that.”

He hates that he’s asking for this. Knows watching Steve do that, hearing about it, will suck just as much as doing it himself. And knowing how much it hurt him to do it, Steve is going to hate doing it even more than he did. But this is their punishment. For being the way they are. Never truly feeling safe. Never truly being happy. Billy presses a kiss into Steve’s soft skin and stays there.

—

Steve reluctantly nods his agreement. He’ll have to find a way

somehow, even if it feels wrong. He'll have to think of something. He shifts in Billy's embrace, leans in to kiss him properly, seal the promise like that. The stale taste of alcohol on Billy's tongue makes him wince, but he deepens the kiss nevertheless, wants to forget about words for awhile. When Billy breaks the kiss to catch a breath, Steve leans his forehead against Billy's, closes his eyes.

"Come home with me?" he asks, on an impulse. They may not get a chance like this for awhile. "My parents aren't in. And you've showed everyone how into girls you are already."

--

Billy's heart beats hard in his chest and he nods wordlessly because there really are no words for how much he likes the sound of that.

"Yeah," he kisses Steve again a little breathlessly and smiles, bringing a hand up to tangle in the back of Steve's hair. "Take me home with you, baby."

Notes for the Chapter:

> Billy POV by ficsandfuckery (women-seem-wicked on tumblr), Steve POV by blithesea (bites-heal on tumblr).

4. Sexual Healing

Summary for the Chapter:

> After the fight comes the make-up sex. After a big fight, a whole fuckload of sex.

Steve leaves first, since he was already on his way out to begin with. He drives home and sits in the driveway for a few minutes, trying to calm down. Even with Billy promising to stay faithful in the end, it feels like some line has been crossed. The thought of Billy and Vicky together, the way they kissed… Steve hadn't even known how much that could hurt. It's not a nice thing to be reminded of. Red drinks and bathroom mirrors. He grimaces, consciously pushing those thoughts away. It's not the same. Not this time.

He gets out of the car, feeling tired.

--

Billy nearly follows Steve out the back gate too, but decides against it as the Beemer drives away. Instead he finds Tommy in the den beside the pool table, making out with his kindergarten girlfriend, both of them clearly too drunk to stand, and grins at them. "I'll pay you back later, alright man?" he mumbles, pulling Tommy's wallet out of the jacket he's discarded over the end of the couch.

"Yeah… totally," Tommy laughs, not hearing him over music and chatter; probably not quite seeing him, either. Billy takes half his cash and then a little more, and tosses the wallet back at the feet of the happy couple.

"See ya around." He sneaks out the back gate only then, avoiding Vicky's high, smoky laughter from the living room, and makes it to his car before he breaks down - the buzz of the alcohol he drank earlier that night now completely gone and the battle of emotions in his head making him feel like he's gone fucking insane.

Steve seriously almost left him tonight. About five minutes ago. Billy still doesn't quite understand *why*, but it almost fucking happened

and he's shaking from how bad the thought of that scared him.

"God dammit, pretty boy…" he sobs sharply and hits the steering wheel with his palm, hard. "God dammit!" The sobs transition into a breathy, wet laugh as he realizes where he's going now, and what "my parents aren't home" and the fact that Neil doesn't expect him home till tomorrow mean, and he turns his key in the ignition. "You're gonna be the death of me, sweetheart," he mutters.

After a quick stop on the way to use the money he stole from Tommy on a couple burgers, some fries, and two dozen mismatched roses from the convenience store near the burger joint, Billy floors it to Steve's. He picks up a pack of cigarettes and a box of Junior Mints at the counter and by the time he pulls up a couple houses down from the Harringtons' he's almost feeling stable again.

He checks his appearance in the rearview mirror and grimaces, but there's only so much he can do to get the stink of Vicky off him before he gets out of the car and walks up to Steve's door. He rings the doorbell and holds the bag and the flowers behind his back while he nervously waits to the sound of the ponderous bell echoing through a nearly empty house.

--

Steve only meant to do a couple of things before Billy arrived. Drinks, of course, music, that would be nice - the house is too empty and quiet like this, even if there's gonna be the two of them there. Billy will get a kick out of his dad's stereo, he thinks with a smile, but then gets held up trying to find music Billy won't actually hate. It's not like he has Billy's kind of music lying around even on a good day, but he tries to at least find something not so offensive to Billy's taste that it distracts him from the main reason he came. *Which is me*, Steve reminds himself, a little defiantly. Not Vicky or anyone else.

Once music is sorted, it seems like already a long time has passed, and he scrambles to find them something to drink. Nothing too heavy, he doesn't want them to get shitfaced. Beer, maybe? Wine? He stands before the party fridge, frowns. Not red wine. A label catches his eye, and he opens the fridge door, smiling. That's the same brand of beer he had with him in his car when he and Billy first started

fooling around, years and years ago, by the feel of it. Some imported stuff, Dutch? Belgian? Would Billy even remember it?

The doorbell yanks him out of his thoughts and he curses, he meant to do some more stuff, prepare better, though he doesn't even know what he wants to do. Maybe pick out some movies beforehand? Too late now. He sprints to the door, a little breathless when he opens it. And when he does, Billy Hargrove looks up at him like something out of a wet dream.

"Hey."

--

Billy looks up at Steve, haloed by the light from the hall and looking so much more put together and whole than he is, and can't help but smile.

"Hey, *baby*," he says. "Can I come in?"

It's only half a joke. Right now, Billy kind of feels like he needs permission for everything. And while with anyone else that would infuriate him, Steve has long since started meaning so many different things than what *other people* mean to Billy. And that gives him a unique power. Billy is starting to realize he would do anything for the boy in front of him. And given how close he came to losing it all tonight, that thought is wholly terrifying.

--

Steve can't help but smile back when Billy smiles at him, his mouth just wants to do it. And he feels so relieved, relieved that Billy didn't change his mind about coming over, relieved that Billy still wants to be with him even after the whole clusterfuck this week has been. He remembers what Billy once said to him, *If it's this dangerous when we're not even fucking yet, I don't wanna stick around for what comes next.* And Steve knows that he's the one who keeps fucking up. But Billy is still here. Against his better judgment, maybe. And Steve can't help but feel the rush of relief over that, just seeing Billy standing there, like he isn't even sure if Steve will let him in. As if.

Come in. Never leave again, he wants to say, but that's ridiculous. So he shrugs, and smiles. "Sure. But there's an admission fee."

--

Billy grins and steps up into the doorway. Hands still precariously behind him, he leans in to give Steve a kiss. It's quick but hungry. Needy.

"I need to put some of this stuff down before I drop it," he says between kisses.

--

"Psh *fine*," Steve sighs, smiling. "What did you bring?" he adds, but when he tries to have a look at what Billy is holding behind his back, Billy twists and walks past him, inside.

—

"Patience, beautiful," Billy insists, suddenly very decisive on the fact that there *is* a right order to these peace offerings. He glances over at Steve, who's followed him into the kitchen now. "Close your eyes," he orders.

--

Steve raises his eyebrows at Billy. Doesn't really know what to expect, but he closes his eyes after a second of hesitation. "Is it a pony?" he teases, "You shouldn't have, baby."

—

Billy rolls his eyes and carefully sets the greasy diner bag down on the kitchen counter, getting the burgers and fries and the box of junior mints out of the bag.

"Mm I'm sure I can get you something to ride if you want it," he suggests with a smirk, turning Steve so he's facing the arrangement, and then placing the roses in his arms.

"Alright, open up."

--

Steve looks, and is a bit puzzled at first. Billy brought him food? Then he looks down at the roses, and can't help but smile. Billy had so ragged him over the roses last time. And Junior Mints, too. He feels wistful when he looks at those. Takes Billy's hand, squeezes it. "So, is this a date?" he asks softly. "Or did you just want to make sure I get enough carbs…"

—

Billy shrugs, a little embarrassed, turning to wrap his arms around Steve's waist from behind, nuzzling into his neck. He feels so perfect in Billy's arms like this, narrow hips and long fingers and perfectly freckled skin that smells like fucking *home* to him now. Exactly what Billy needs.

"Wanted to take care of you, I guess, since I've been so shitty at that lately…. Always…" he mumbles into Steve's hair. And then he turns his head up a bit so he can speak more clearly and gestures at the spread in front of them. "So I got dinner, but then I figured roses are an apology thing, so I wanted to do that, and then I saw the mints and I couldn't *not*… I dunno. It's stupid."

He laughs a little and buries his face again.

--

"Yeah, it's stupid," Steve agrees, and smiles when Billy punches his side.

"But I like it," he adds a little more softly, and reaches out to pick one of the fries from the paper sleeve. "You don't even eat fries, you dweeb." It shouldn't please him so much that Billy got them stuff to eat that he thought Steve might like, but it does.

--

"Yeah but you're a fiend for them," Billy grumbles. A flush on his cheeks at just how much knowledge he has of Steve's habits that he probably shouldn't, given how rarely they actually hang out like this. "C'mon, you hungry? Let's eat before it gets cold," he suggests.

--

“Fucking starving,” Steve admits, though he really hadn’t been before. Not after that game, not after that party, but now that Billy is here, he feels like he could eat a whole cow on toast. He doesn’t want to move, though. Billy so close to him feels good, and alright, maybe Steve is feeling a bit clingy after the whole Vicky thing. He doesn’t care. He wants Billy so close he can feel the warmth of his breath on his neck, the dull thudding of his heart. He doesn’t want to move a muscle.

“Where do you want to eat?” he asks, stalling for time, running his hands over Billy’s as he stares down at his flowers. “We could take it to the couch if you like, or the rug by the hearth?” They’ve got such a good track record with hearth rugs, too.

--

Billy turns to kiss Steve’s lips, breathing a laugh.

“Mm as long as you’re there I don’t care where we eat, Harrington,” he says. “Just lead the way.”

--

Steve decides on the couch, and very reluctantly gives up Billy’s embrace to get the beers and the food and the junior mints all there in one piece. He pauses and goes back for the roses, though - if he puts them in a vase, his mother is going to ask where they came from, maybe assume they’re for *her* - so he puts them in a mason jar and brings them into the living room with them. Makes a mental note to take them up to his room later.

Billy looks a bit out of place on the huge suede couch, but only until Steve slumps against him, his back against Billy’s chest, and begins to tuck into the food for earnest, hand-feeding Billy some fries whenever he feels like it. Kissing Billy’s salty lips is just an added bonus.

“So listen, I was thinking,” he say with his mouth full. “Remember when you drove me home that one time, after we… And you knew where I live.” Billy acknowledges with a grunt, but seems to

concentrate hard on picking a bit of food from his teeth. “How did you know that?” Steve smiles angelically. “I don’t think you’d ever been over before.”

--

Billy glances at Steve, feeling put on the spot once again, and feels himself blush. Shakes his head and reaches for a fry.

“Don’t make me answer that, babe. I don’t wanna-- You’re gonna think I’m some kind of creep,” he mumbles. But Steve just hums patiently and turns so Billy can’t hide. Billy groans and looks away. “Tommy told me,” he says. “After I asked. Think he thought I was gonna leave dogshit on your doorstep. I didn’t drive past it or anything though…” He shifts his feet uncomfortably. “Much…”

--

This is even better than anything Steve could have hoped to have achieved with his teasing. The thought of Billy Hargrove, thinking of him while they were still spitting insults into each other’s faces at any given moment… it makes him feel fuzzy and warm inside. He turns his head further, so he can kiss Billy’s face. “You weirdo. I wish I’d have seen that.”

--

Billy kisses Steve back, but that doesn’t stop him from defensively elbowing his boyfriend in the ribs, causing him to shift and let out a surprised sort of grunt. Billy laughs and kisses him again, but then he feels something press against his thigh and pauses, remembering the pendant.

“Hey,” he breathes. “Is that…”

Without waiting, he shifts Steve a little further onto his back and reaches into the pocket at the front of his jeans awkwardly. Steve lets him, and in no time he’s got the pendant out and in his hand. It feels good to see it again. And to feel it, warm from Steve’s body. He turns another kiss to Steve’s lips and gives in to the temptation that sitting like this gives him, to push Steve the rest of the way back onto the

couch and straddle his thighs, leaning down close to brush the fronts of their jeans together.

--

“Do you,” Steve starts, and then hesitates, closes his eyes so he can concentrate on something other than the feeling of Billy rubbing against his crotch. “Do you want it back now?” he asks, doing his best not to sound like he cares, *too* much.

--

Billy thinks about it for a second, and then he shakes his head. He can feel Steve tense under his touch at that, but he follows it up quickly.

“Not yet,” he says, and opens up the clasp. “Tonight… Tonight I wanna see it around *your* neck, baby,” he suggests. Kisses a mole on the neck in question and holds the necklace up questioningly. *May I?*

--

“I guess.” Steve frowns, trying not to show his disappointment. Yeah, Billy had only given the pendant back a few days ago, and yeah, they are still in the middle of a mess, but he had hoped…

“You still, I mean. If we’re gonna be extra careful and all that in the next weeks though, how will you—” *How will you remember you’re mine*, he wants to say, and doesn’t.

—

Billy frowns and shakes his head. Pulls him into a kiss.

“I’ll wear it, baby. I *want* to wear it. I just—” He tries to word this right. “Now that it’s been mine for a while, seeing you in it…” He gives up and kisses Steve again. “You’re *mine,* okay?” he breathes. “Just wear it for tonight,” he begs.

—

Steve nods, inclines his head so Billy can slip the pendant around his

neck. It does feel nice, smooth and heavy against his chest. Like Billy. “Yours,” he says, wonderingly, as he looks down on it. Billy’s body holds him so securely, Steve feels his heartbeat, fast and nervous on top of him. He stares up at Billy, but it’s hard looking him in the eyes somehow. Easier to focus on little single things, like the smooth curve of Billy’s lips, the curl falling over his forehead, the crinkles at the corner of his eye.

“We should go upstairs,” he says, arms snaking around Billy’s waist heavily, belying his words. “Mmh,” Billy replies, apparently just as content to stay put as Steve is. Steve closes his eyes.

“And I think you should fuck me tonight. I want you to.”

—

At first Billy doesn’t hear it. *Fuck*, and *you,* and *me,* are all he needs to begin to nod approvingly. But then the rest of the sentence clarifies in his mind and suddenly Billy’s having trouble breathing normally.

“Really?” he whispers, hardly daring to believe Steve’s words. “Steve…” he gasps, unable to keep from smiling a little. “Y-- you’re ready for that?”

--

Just saying the words has made Steve feel oddly vulnerable, a nervous pit in his stomach. Still, it’s hard not to smile at Billy’s obvious excitement, so Steve doesn’t bother. He smiles right back. “Yeah,” he says, and hell, he had thought Billy would be into the idea, but just feeling the way his cock unmistakably thickens against him just at the thought, that’s better. “I mean, you said you wanted to pop my cherry in my bed, so.”

That was so long ago, but Steve still remembers how much he had liked the idea then, even if the tone of it had been so very different, in those days. “Just holding you to that. You’re a man of your word, right?”

--

Billy hums and pulls Steve into another kiss.

“I’ve been experimenting with it lately,” he allows.

It feels nice just to kiss, but now that Steve’s brought up the idea of fucking like that, Billy doesn’t let it go on for long before he’s pulling his lips away and pulling Steve up from the couch, following close behind.

“I still don’t know where your bedroom is, baby,” he purrs in his ear as he wraps his arms around him from behind once again. “You’ll have to lead the way.”

--

“Eager,” Steve smirks, and flushes a little when he realises that yeah, he wants Billy to be fucking eager about this. Wants him to think of nothing else. No one else. He leaves the half-eaten food on the coffee table, but grabs the roses to take with them before he pulls Billy with him upstairs, laughing when Billy rushes up, nearly making them stumble and fall. It ends up with Steve desperately balancing the roses and leaning into Billy and the bannister, and he takes the opportunity to kiss Billy, halfway up. He’s not stalling, he is as desperate as Billy to get to his bedroom, but. He wants to savor it, too. Wants to remember every bit of this one.

--

Billy leans into the kiss and holds Steve steady with a smile against his lips and a hand against his left bicep.

“You good?” he checks, and when Steve nods he kisses him again and presses them both up into motion again. Steve laughs that smiley laugh that makes Billy’s belly feel warm, and returns to leading him up and to the left down a short hall.

—

Steve’s room is messy with clothes strewn about, a damp towel hanging over his chair, the bed unmade, but Steve couldn’t care less. Billy won’t mind about the bed, he knows that. So once he stows away the flowers on his writing desk he turns them towards it, pulls Billy close to him for a kiss, topples them both over onto the

mattress. He doesn't even bother with switching on the lamp, the light from the pool is throwing glittery slivers of brightness onto the ceiling. He kisses Billy hungrily, reaches under his pillow for the family-size bottle of lube — God, he's glad he bought that one — pushes it into Billy's hand. Quick, before he thinks too much about this.

—

Billy chuckles at Steve's eagerness, but sets the lube back down beside them on the wide bed.

"We're not even naked yet, baby," he reminds him softly. "Hold on."

He presses Steve onto his back and kisses him a little longer, unbuttoning his jeans and pushing his sweater up to expose his tight belly. He leans down to kiss it before letting Steve up to take his clothes off, watching him with lustful awe in the soft, filtered light from the window.

—

Steve undresses quickly, shivers a little when he shucks his socks and underwear, though more from nervous excitement than from the cold. It feels odd, being more naked than Billy is, Billy hasn't taken off anything yet. Only his habit of running around with his shirt half unbuttoned even in the middle of winter prevents Steve from feeling decidedly underdressed.

"Talk to me," he murmurs, leaning in close to kiss Billy, kiss the hungry look on his face. "You can charm the panties off a nun with that voice of yours…" He grins at Billy's indignant snort, steals another kiss. "Charm the pants off me, too." Doesn't matter if his pants are already gone, pushed towards the end of the bed.

—

Billy smiles into another kiss and pushes Steve back down onto the mattress, kneeling between his thighs.

"You know I've been wondering what it would be like to do this since before I knew your name?" he purrs, putting Steve's hands up on

him, telling him to help him undress now. As soon as Steve's hands begin to open buttons, trailing down his chest, Billy slides one hand up under the back of Steve's thigh to cup his ass and groans a little, stroking what of him he can reach.

"You have such a nice ass, baby, goddamn."

—

Steve pushes Billy's shirt off him, leans up for a kiss, licks over his nipple.

"Do you like it better," he starts, wondering how to phrase it. "*Doing* the fucking? Better than the other way round, I mean." It occurs to him that he never bothered to think about it before. Billy's always seemed so into it, ever since the first night they made out.

—

"Better?" he says, and slips a hand between Steve's legs to stroke the length of Steve's slowly filling cock. "Mm I wouldn't say that." He gives him a squeeze and leans closer for a kiss. "Getting fucked by you is easily the best I've…" He shakes his head and kisses Steve again. "It's so good, babe. But fucking you is gonna be good too. You're gonna love it, baby, I promise."

—

"Yeah, ok," Steve agrees, though he can't really imagine it yet, not loving it, or even just doing it. He's missing all types of reference for this.

Billy is still not even half naked, he realizes, reaching between them to open Billy's fly at least, smiling when he finds Billy is not wearing underwear, though the thought of how Vicky Marsden might have found out this tonight as well makes him feel hot and irritated.

"Just don't go too slow," he mumbles, closing his eyes. "I know you think I can't handle it otherwise, but—" He stops, doesn't know how to say that he might just lose his nerve.

—

Billy shimmies out of his jeans and tugs his shirt the rest of the way off too. Kneels down between Steve's legs again and licks a wet strip up his cock.

"It's not just about *handling* it, baby, it's about enjoying yourself too. Spread your legs for me, pretty boy," he says, nuzzling the soft skin of his thighs and pressing his left leg up a little, tugging his hips just so. He leans in to lick at his hole, and spreads Steve's legs a little more to give himself room to press in past that first twitching ring of muscle.

—

"Oh *god*," Steve moans and arches his back off the bed, hands fisting in the sheet. Fuck, but he had forgotten how good that feels, how filthy hot, and knowing that this is just a tiny taste of what's to come, that it's going to be Billy's cock soon instead of his tongue, makes Steve both want to shy away from it and push back for more at the same time.

"Billy," he groans when Billy relents for a second, maybe to catch his breath. "Fuck, are you trying to kill me?"

—

Billy smirks and presses a kiss to Steve's soft, inner thigh.

"D'you want me to stop?" he asks, knowing the answer.

--

"*No*, you fucking dickhead," Steve groans, nudging Billy's side with his foot impatiently. "You just wanna hear me beg, don't you?"

Billy just looks smug at that, and Steve doesn't care. He's got no pride left where Billy's tongue in his ass is concerned. "Do it again, please, babe!"

—

Billy nudges Steve's legs further apart, and takes him in his hands, straining a little to hold Steve's hips up off the mattress until Steve

gets the picture and takes some of the burden on his own.

“Mm baby you’re so good for me,” he hums, and dives in once again, slicking the way with his saliva and minimally stretching his tight hole with his tongue. He loves the way this is already prompting soft sighs and moans from Steve, but he doesn’t let it distract him from the main goal. After a little while he brings the lube over, and slicks up a finger to slide it in alongside his tongue.

Steve’s surprised breath and clenched muscles around him are expected, but no less beautiful. Billy leans up to press a kiss to Steve’s confused but still growing erection, and slips the finger in and out a couple times, letting the muscles get used to its intrusion.

--

No, wait, Steve wants to say, panicking a bit at the strange, weird stretch, which doesn’t hurt, not *exactly*, but going from just the tip of Billy’s tongue, slick and versatile, to his thick, blunt finger up his ass is a hell of a thing to get used to. Billy’s mouth on his cock, not really engaging, just a pleasant distraction, isn’t distracting nearly enough. Steve’s hands scramble for purchase on the sheets, one of them finds Billy’s free hand on his hip, grips it, squeezes hard. It helps.

Then Billy crooks his finger and Steve’s world tips sideways.

—

Billy can’t help but hum a little at the pressure of Steve’s tight walls around his finger and the surprised look of pleasure on his face. He kisses Steve’s cock again, his balls, his thighs, and slowly fucks his finger in and out of Steve’s spasming hole, calming him, loosening him, letting him adjust. He nudges that spot inside of him a couple more times, but softly. Doesn’t let Steve get truly satisfied before he slips his finger almost out, circling the most important, first couple inches again.

Steve still feels tense below him though, and Billy knows that will only make this worse for him, so he leans down once more and slips his tongue over his slick hole to join his finger.

--

“Oh fuck,” Steve grinds out, eyes shut tightly against the onslaught of sensations. Everything is still weird, Billy’s finger is not going anywhere, and he feels raw and exposed, a shudder wracking through him when Billy nudges that spot again, and yeah, okay, he is starting to *get* it now, never could find it on his own, in the showers, when he was feeling adventurous and Billy was leagues and lightyears away. But it’s not *just* weird, it’s exciting, too, and Billy is using his tongue again, making Steve’s knees just weak with desire. Yeah, he gets it now.

—

Billy slips his finger out completely and slicks up another, giving him a little nip on the inner thigh before he eases the two of them inside together slowly. He keeps them in motion constantly, slowly easing in and out by fractions of an inch, two steps forward one step back as it were. Steve’s tightening a little anxiously around the decidedly bigger stretch of *two* of Billy’s fingers, but the discomfort on his face doesn’t seem to be translating to pain yet, and his cock is still standing strong.

“We good, pretty boy?” Billy asks just to be sure, as his fingers bottom out in Steve’s stretched-tight hole and still.

--

At first Steve is concentrating too hard on breathing to answer. Breathing helps, he finds, every time he exhales his ass seems content to relax just a bit on the relentless reality of Billy’s fingers.

“Yeah, we’re… we’re fine,” he squeezes out when he realizes Billy is waiting for an answer, looking up at him searchingly. He wishes he could kiss Billy then, the brief look of concern and the tiny smidge of relief on Billy’s face touch him more than all of the things Billy is doing to his ass. Then Billy curls his fingers, a firm press on that bit inside him that makes him see stars, and he has to close his eyes again. “Mmmmh, we’re real good,” he moans once the pressure subsides.

—

Billy grins and brings his lips closer to Steve's legs. Sucks a kiss into the soft, sweet skin of his thigh as he slowly begins to fuck in and out of him with the two fingers. He takes his time, letting Steve adjust to their width, before he starts holding them a little apart, giving him a little bit more of a stretch just to be safe. He brushes Steve's prostate one more time before pulling his fingers out completely and picking up the lube once again.

He slicks himself up quickly. Doing all of this to Steve has had him rock hard for what feels like hours, and his hand is all too welcome on his throbbing dick. All that's left is the main event, and while Billy would love nothing better than to rush straight to it, he wants Steve to enjoy this as much as he should. So he brushes his cockhead over Steve's hole softly, making them both shiver, and pulls Steve's right leg up over his shoulder to hold him up and open.

"All mine," he breathes, looking down over his gorgeous boyfriend, spread beneath him, and feeling a swell of awe. Steve's cheeks color slightly, but before he can answer, Billy inches forward slightly, just the tip of his cock pushing into Steve's tight, slick heat.

--

"I— oh," Steve moans, clenching up involuntarily, but then Billy leans in and kisses him, and fuck yeah, that helps a ton, actually. He forgets about how stretched and open he feels, how exposed and silly and new to all this, and when Billy kisses his breath away, Steve melts and shifts beneath him, and then, *fuck*, the head of Billy's dick pushes in for real, suddenly inside him, and the rush of the sudden stretch makes him gasp and moan.

"*Baby*," he sighs helplessly, unsure if he can deal with this, but then Billy moves, pushes in just a bit more, and Steve realizes there's so much more to come still. He breathes, hard. "Tell me you love me," he asks, shameless.

—

"I-- uhhh." Billy can't even think straight. Steve tightens around him

and for a second his vision goes white. “*Fuck*,” he all but whimpers. “I-- gimme a second.”

Billy presses their lips together again through a moan, and reaches blindly for Steve’s left hand, lacing their fingers together and squeezing hard as he pushes just a little further in, bottoming out. It feels like all the blood in his body is rushing toward his cock, and like Steve’s muscles are going to squeeze the consciousness out of him.

After a moment he breaks their kiss, which has gone tense and still with the shock and relief of being fully connected like this, and leans up on his arms enough to look down at Steve again. His smile is sloppy and dazed but he doesn’t give a shit.

“I’m so in love with you, Harrington,” he confesses, shaking his head. “Fuck, I’m just-- you’ve got me so fucked up for you.”

--

Steve wants to say something back, but good god, he needs a moment, he didn’t expect Billy to feel like this, stretching him, making him feel filled up, nothing his fingers could have prepared him for. “Billy,” is the first word he finds enough air for, “does it feel, is it good?” He feels like a butterfly pinned to the wall, strains up to seek the reassurance of Billy’s mouth.

—

Billy’s laugh is a little giddy as he leans down to return the kiss.

“Amazing,” he breathes against Steve’s lips. “You feel amazing.”

He holds himself still until he just can’t anymore, and then moves only slightly - staying almost fully inside him - to search for that bundle of nerves he brushed with his fingers before.

--

Steve moans slightly when Billy moves, it’s not even a thrusting movement yet, just shifting the pressure from one angle to the other, and it feels good, less intense than before, more like a little hum of pleasure beneath everything else, Billy’s solid weight on top of him,

the blunt presence of his cock that seems to get bigger every time Steve takes a new breath. He reaches out, touches Billy's cheek.

"Nobody better than you," he says softly, smiles at the way Billy turns his face into the touch, sucks Steve's thumb into his mouth, bites it fondly. "Nobody."

—

Billy doesn't know how to take words like that. Words that Billy knows are miles from being true. He can't possibly answer them, though, because it feels like he's got something lodged in his throat. So instead of trying he leans in to kiss Steve again softly, slowly, before he leans back and pulls Steve's other leg over his shoulder, stroking up his thigh.

He can see where they're connected like this, between their contrasting patches of hair, and it's exhilarating. Billy shifts his hips just a little, and glances back up at Steve's face to watch the reaction as he pulls out an inch, and slides himself back in. Testing the waters with a couple slow thrusts.

--

"Ha," Steve exhales, Billy's thrusts pushing the air clean out of him, but it's a good thing, he finds to his surprise how good it feels, the shifting pressure, the pleasure carefully meted out while Billy watches him, never takes his eyes off him. Just when Steve starts getting into it, anticipating Billy's moves, Billy snaps his hips, hard and fast, and the way that makes Steve clench and moan has them both gasping for breath together. "Fuck, baby," Steve moans, "Fuck, yeah, like that…"

—

Billy slides half-way out to snap back in again with a groan.

"Ohh y'like that, baby?" he grins as Steve squeezes hard around him, continuing to stroke Steve's slightly quivering thigh as he pulls out and does it again. "D'you like it when I *fuck* into you, *King Steve*?" he says as he continues to move, building up to a real rhythm.

--

“Fuck,” Steve moans weakly, *unfair*, Billy asking him things when all of his mind is on the cock in his ass, really starting to fuck him now, actual fucking, Billy Hargrove is fucking him. Feeling it and imagining it turn out to be such different things.

Billy stops then, stays, buried deep in Steve’s ass, and Steve wants him to move, needs him to move. “Yeah, I like it,” he says, because Billy seems to be waiting for him to say it out loud, the fucking bastard. “I like it when you *fuck* me, fucking hell—” He is cut off when Billy pulls out again, almost completely, enough to make Steve worry that he might, clench around him with the fear of it, but Billy doesn’t go that far, thrusts back in with a couple of hard jabs that make Steve’s toes curl.

—

“Mmf you’re better than I even imagined, pretty boy,” Billy groans and leans in for a kiss, loving the feeling of Steve bent double under him to keep his legs on Billy’s shoulders. He stays buried deep for a moment, and just rolls his hips to hit his boyfriend’s prostate while his cock is trapped between their bellies and his thighs. He feels it twitch between them and hums appreciatively.

--

Steve feels his cock react even more to Billy’s words, the soft breathless praise, almost wrought out of him against his will, and moans, clenches around Billy, feels his groan at that all the way inside him.

“What did you, what did you imagine?” he asks, breath hitching when Billy picks up the pace again, “Fucking me in, in the showers?” Fuck, but now that he knows what it would feel like, the thought of doing it anywhere, *anywhere*, Billy just looking at him like he sometimes does, like he can’t keep his hands off Steve, not for the life of him — the thought of that sends a rush of guilty pleasure through Steve, reminds him of his cock nearly squished between them. He takes himself in hand, gasps when just at that moment Billy seems to fuck him *deeper*.

—

Billy groans, and watches Steve's hand move for a moment before deciding to allow it. He's not moving fast enough to be in too much danger of bringing himself over the edge too soon, and his hand looks so nice moving like that, soft, thoughtless, casually touching himself while Billy fucks him.

"Mmyeah," he answers at last. "Of course. Or in the locker room, on the court, in English… anywhere where I could bend you over and--" He snaps his hips forward indicatively.

--

Steve laughs at the thought of Billy fucking him in *English* of all places, then the breathy laughter turns into a moan as something shifts and Billy's cock drags along his prostate. "I thought you meant for real," he smiles, "Thinking of fucking me somewhere, like now… Bed never made the list, then?"

—

Billy pauses to kiss Steve on the lips. Shakes his head.

"You don't understand," he says. "None of it was ever meant to be *real*. I didn't think in a million years I'd get to *do it*. The fantasy was about fucking *King Steve Harrington*. It doesn't get more fantastical than that, pretty boy."

--

Steve looks at Billy, feels the sincerity in his words, which coupled with the way Billy's cock is stretching him seven ways from Sunday makes Steve flush and want to kiss him, so badly. He doesn't care if the whole King Steve bit is a power play for Billy, if the whole thing never had anything to do with who he really is, at first. That was then. Billy knows him now, wants him *now*, still seems to think Steve is the hottest thing since sliced bread, for whatever unfathomable reason.

"It's real," he reminds Billy, exhales when Billy swivels his hips a bit, not thrusting so much as grinding his dick deeper inside, as if that

was still possible.

—

Billy brings a hand up to Steve's face and holds it there, brushing his thumb appreciatively over Steve's features.

"Promise?" he smiles down at him softly.

--

Steve turns his face towards Billy's hand, kisses what he can reach of it. "Promise," he says, breathless because Billy is lying on top of him, bending him in ways he never thought he could bend, stretching him in ways he never imagined possible, and also a bit breathless because he means it, wants to promise everything to Billy, promise and hold himself to it.

Billy holds his gaze for a moment, *does he believe it? Is it finally starting to sink in?* Steve leans up to kiss him, but the movement makes Billy's cock press into him just *so*, and he falls back to the bed with a groan.

—

Billy leans in over him, but not close enough for a kiss. Instead just pulls out almost all the way and fucks back into Steve.

"Then tell me how you want it, baby," he purrs, and presses in to suck a bruise into the skin of Steve's neck.

--

"Ah," Steve sighs when Billy goes deep, hard, and he puts his arms around Billy's neck to keep him from moving out of range again, wants to have him there even if he can't focus enough on actual kisses.

"Want you to fuck me," he manages between thrusts, glares a bit at Billy when he laughs at that. Yeah, okay, he knows that's what they're doing, but he wasn't *finished* yet. "Fuck me like you wanted," he explains, "Like, like you were imagining, when—"

—

Billy groans and covers Steve's mouth with his as his hips still for a moment and his hands come up to stroke down Steve's thighs to his pretty ass.

"You want me to," he pants a little, shakes his head disbelievingly, "bend you over and make you my bitch, *Harrington*?…" he asks. "Show you who's really king around here?" he adds with a wry smile. He wants it still, maybe even more than he used to. But it feels strange and not allowed to say it like that now. Now that they've fucked as tenderly as they have, and kissed, and confessed… To say he still wants to fuck Steve until he can't sit straight for a week feels wrong. Cruel.

--

Steve imagines it, feels the heat beneath Billy's words, clenches reflexively at the thought of it. Billy fucking him as if they've just met, just two strangers, and Billy still unable to keep away, wanting to fuck him so badly.

"Yeah," he admits, flushing a bit, but not flinching from Billy's gaze, "yeah, want you to fuck me, like, like that."

—

Billy has to close his eyes for a second. Leans in to kiss him one last time, letting Steve's legs down from his shoulders as he sits back up.

"Come here, baby," he growls, and pulls out of him entirely.

--

Steve groans a bit, feels the loss of Billy's cock keenly, everything feels weird and stretched, his ass, his legs, his mind. Billy manhandles him on the bed, sure, gentle hands turning him, guiding him to all fours, pushing his legs further apart, his ass higher in the air. He moans, cock swaying hard and heavy between his legs. Billy is quiet behind him, but Steve can hear the soft snick of the lube bottle, can guess what Billy is doing even before he feels more slickness on his ass. He tenses, expects Billy to push right back in, and Billy does, but

only with a finger at first. Steve's disappointed moan turns into a whine when Billy goes right for that spot inside him, and, fuck, Steve doesn't know if it's the angle or the fact that he can't see Billy's face, but it feels different this time. Deeper, heavier, more vulnerable and open.

Before he can get used to it, Billy pulls out and there it is, the hard reality of his cock. But there's no time at all to tense up, Billy pushes in all the way in one smooth stroke, and fuck, it's so good. "Fuck, yeah, fuck me," he moans, but Billy doesn't need to be told.

—

Billy pulls out almost all the way and snaps his hips forward again, pulling back on Steve's narrow hips to fully bury himself inside. It's a bit breathtaking how quickly he's taken to this - how little time it has taken Steve to adjust to the reality of this entirely new world of pleasure - and it makes Billy groan and fuck deeper just *thinking* about it.

He builds up a rhythm quickly. Uses that first experimental prod with his fingers to know just where and how to push in from this angle so that he's nailing Steve's prostate with nearly every slam of his hips against Steve's perfect ass.

"Mm you're mine, Harrington. All mine," he grunts. Steve whimpers and reaches for his cock again, but this time Billy swats his hand away. Takes Steve's cock in his own firm grip without moving it at all.

"Who do you belong to, *King Steve*?" he growls against his ear. And it's just part of the fantasy, of doing this like he always imagined, that's what he tells himself. But his throat is raw when he breathes, "Whose bitch are you?" His heart still hurting with the knowledge that Steve so easily could have not been his anymore.

—

"Fuck," Steve gasps, Billy's cock feels so good, hits that spot inside with every thrust at this angle, and with the way Billy has been fucking him hard and fast, Steve needs to touch his cock, so badly, he

needs it. “Yours,” he moans, fisting the sheets, trying to will Billy into moving again, give him what he needs. “Yours, I’m yours, *Billy*, yours —“

—

Billy groans and sets his hand in motion on Steve’s cock. Not nearly as much as he needs, but just enough that Steve tenses around him and his mantra falls off into moans. Steve’s ass is tightening around him now in such powerful waves that Billy his shaking a bit with trying not to come. But he’s going to. And the thought of coming inside of Steve has him inching closer to that inevitable edge.

“Fuck, Steve…” He grabs onto Steve’s ass with both hands, letting out a low groan. “Oh you feel so good, baby, I’m mmh…” Billy fucks into Steve a couple more times as he comes suddenly, shooting deep inside him before he half collapses against Steve’s back, holding himself up on weak limbs as he peppers Steve’s pretty back with soft kisses.

“*Fuck…”* he breathes.

--

Steve draws a shuddery breath, moans, clenches around Billy’s cock, it feels weird, the sudden slickness in his ass, but worse, he still hasn’t come, doesn’t know how he can when Billy isn’t even moving anymore, and he pushes back against him involuntarily, a miserable moan the only thing he can utter right now. He’s not going to touch himself, Billy hasn’t said he could, but he might die or his cock might just fall off, soon.

—

“Fuck, sorry baby, it snuck up on me,” Billy pants, and weakly fucks into Steve’s come-filled ass a couple more times as he trails fingers over Steve’s hot, needy cock. “I’m gonna make you come so hard you forget your name, I promise. Just stay exactly how you are, pretty boy.” Billy pulls out quickly, and, hands jumping to Steve’s hips to keep them tilted up, leans down to press kisses to the swell of his pretty ass, all the way down it to his shuddery thighs.

He smooths his hands over them and then gives Steve's ass a squeeze, pulling his cheeks apart for him. His hole is almost back to it's normal size, but it's irritated-looking and slick with lube and a little bit of come that followed Billy's dick out. Steve whines and presses back into his hands - *do something!* - and Billy groans before leaning in to lick wetly up his boyfriend's crack, tasting lube and come and hardly anything of Steve's sweet skin at all. *Shame.*

—

Steve bucks and groans, too far gone for words, and he can't believe what Billy is doing, his tongue up there, licking it all up, fucking Steve with his tongue now that his dick is out of commission. Thank god Billy is gracious enough to stroke Steve's cock while he's at it, otherwise Steve might just have exploded with all the teasing. He does explode now, too, all over Billy's hand, shuddering and moaning and clenching around the tongue fucking him deep where it almost feels like Billy's dick left a space inside him. Afterwards he slumps down on his side on the bed, breathing hard.

—

Billy slides up the bed beside Steve and pauses for only a second before he wraps his arms around him and tugs him closer. He wants to say something, but the reality of all that just happened presses on him like a weight and he can't speak. Instead he brushes the shaggy long hair at the back of Steve's neck out of the way and presses kisses to his warm skin, closing his eyes.

--

Steve stays still for a few minutes, catching his breath, feels himself cool down, the slight sheen of sweat on his skin drying up. He shivers, grabs the duvet and sheets and pulls it over them.

"Holy fucking shit," he murmurs, feeling soft around the edges, kinda blurry. Good, almost like he does after smoking something. It's a bit weird, and he doesn't quite know what to do with that feeling.

"That was…" It's hard to find words.

He wiggles, turns around so he can see Billy's face, kiss him, see if he looks as blissed out as Steve feels. Though he doubts that anyone in the world does, right now.

—

Billy hums and tugs the blankets further up around them, tucking Steve in with his free arm before he slides it back in under the covers with them and snuggles up close to him again for a kiss. It feels oddly innocent, being so cosy together like this, under the covers. Billy's struck with the temptation to pull them all the way up and make it into a blanket fort situation. Smiles hazily at the thought of it.

"Your ass, baby," Billy breathes, giving it a squeeze and stroking the skin of it softly, distracting himself from the thoughts. "I could worship your ass like a religion." He leans in to press their lips together again with a hum, and he can feel the pendant on Steve's chest between them, cool and hard and *theirs*. "Mm and your lips," he says, pulling back. "And your eyes." Okay, now he's just listing things he likes. But Steve's smiling softly back at him, and that's what matters.

--

"So you liked it, huh?" Steve asks, smiling, and yeah, alright, that's fishing in the most blatant way, but he really wants to hear it. With him trying the getting fucked part for the first time ever, it feels like they did fucking amazing, but he has no experience to compare with. Billy, in his mind, has fucked about half of California, the sexy half, anyway.

—

Billy shakes his head a little, smiling, and presses into another deep kiss.

"You kidding me?" he asks, raising his left leg a little to wrap around Steve's and tangle their bodies together more fully. "That was the best time I've ever had topping, baby. And you know I don't bullshit about sex." He meets Steve's eyes steadily and strokes his back softly, holding him. "You take it as good as you give it, pretty boy," he says.

“And that fact alone is…” he trails off with a deeply satisfied little moan and a smile.

--

“Mmmmh.” Steve doesn’t care if Billy is bullshitting or not, it feels good to hear it. He puts his hand on Billy’s chest, feels the solid beat of his heart. “I guess we should grab a shower or something, huh?” he asks without much enthusiasm, because he might as well drift off in this glowy haze, just him and Billy in his bed.

—

“Or something,” Billy agrees lazily, Steve’s hand on his chest making his skin feel warm and tingly, like they aren’t touching every other available place. “You know what you really need right now, baby? A nice warm *bath*.” Steve makes a face, starts to shake his head, but Billy leans in to kiss his neck and nods convincingly. “I’ll make you one. Trust me, sweetheart, you’re gonna be singing my praises. D’you have Epsom salt?”

—

“I think you’re confusing me with someone else, like your maiden aunt or something,” Steve protests. He isn’t quite sure what Epsom salt is, but it sounds like something you don’t have lying around in your bathroom until you are at least 85. Billy just laughs and wriggles out of the bed, giving him a quick kiss but not stopping when Steve makes an unhappy noise at the interruption of their cosiness. Unfair. Moments later he can hear the sound of the bath being run, ugh. He’ll have to get up after all, then.

The way to his bathroom seems to take forever, because he’s tired, and yeah, alright, starting to feel a bit sore. Still not a five-year-old who needs bath time though, he wants to remind Billy. Billy is sitting on the rim of the tub, fiddling with some bath bubbles he must have found under the sink or something, because Steve can’t remember ever using them before. Looking at his boyfriend doing something so randomly domestic as running them a bath does something funny to Steve’s stomach though. He walks over the rest of the way, leans in (with a bit of a wince, this strange soreness is going to take some

getting used to), and kisses Billy, the soft skin of his neck. But then he notices a love bite and frowns, lightly runs his fingers over it. Funny, he can't remember putting that there.

—

"Feel that. Should be warm enough for--" Billy turns into Steve's touch and instantly freezes when he catches the direction of his gaze. Steve frowns down at him questioningly and Billy lowers his eyes.

--

Steve doesn't have to ask, then. Billy's face is giving the answer quite obviously. He feels a surge of anger; it was bad enough hearing about Billy and *her* before. Now coming face to face with a reminder that she got her hands on Billy and felt comfortable enough to do *that* — but Billy has already apologized, has promised he is never going near her again. And he looks pitiful now, like he's waiting for Steve to chew him out for it, give him hell, maybe kick him out. Steve takes a deep breath, steeling himself.

He leans in closer and sticks his hand into the water. "Yeah, that's alright."

—

Billy starts at the pressure on his shoulder when Steve leans on him to test the water, at Steve's voice. Glances up at him confused, worried. But Steve's face shows genuine care for him - he even tries a small smile - and though there's a lot of hurt there, Billy feels lighter knowing Steve at least isn't going to throw him out.

"I love you," he says, because apparently he can't turn it off now that he's started saying it, and because right now doesn't seem the right time to try.

--

Steve swallows, nods. He feels keenly the gap where he should say it back, but the words get stuck in his throat. And he knows Billy is going to think he isn't saying it back because of the Vicky thing, which isn't true. When did Billy become the one to say it all the time,

anyway?

“Listen,” he says, looking down at the water, not at Billy. “I like hearing it, I really do. But…”

He shrugs. Not trying to be dramatic or anything. “People have said that to me and not meant it. Before. So.” He feels pitiful himself, now. And the last thing he wants is Billy’s pity. But now that he has started, he needs to finish.

“So if you don’t mean it, like… all the way, I’d rather you didn’t say it. Alright?”

—

Billy frowns and stands up, trying to get Steve to *look* at him, if nothing else.

“What?” he asks. “Babe, you think I don’t *mean* that?” Just a couple days before he might have jumped on the opportunity to backpedal. To ease up on how fucking serious those words make all this feel. But he’s grown attached to that seriousness, even if it’s not quite comfortable yet, and if he turned back on it now he doesn’t know how he’d live with it.

“Harrington,” he says, making Steve meet his eyes with a hand on his cheek, “I’m so stupidly head over heels for you it’s scary. When you threatened to leave me tonight I thought I was gonna fuckin’ die. I haven’t felt anything like this since…” He chokes a little but continues on. “You’re really fucking important to me, okay? I wouldn’t just say that.”

—

Steve blinks, nods. Feels stupid and achy, inside. It’s not an easy thing to hear and process, after telling himself for so long not to expect anything. Not to jump too far.

“Since when?” he asks, and it’s not just to distract himself from the way his stomach is feeling like a bottomless pit. Billy is actually being open for once. Steve figures, fuck it. Might as well ride the tide.

—

Billy frowns. Shakes his head a little.

“What?” he asks. Is Steve asking him when he fell in love? Billy’s not even sure *he* knows that. Or is he asking…

—

“You haven’t felt like this since when?” Steve asks, flushing with the boldness of asking. But tonight of all nights, it feels like he’s earned it.

—

Billy pauses. Doesn’t look over at Steve’s face, though he can feel his gaze on him. A wave of mild panic goes through him at the thought of telling Steve about this now. When he’s already so skittish, seems so ready to be jealous of anyone, even Vicky fucking Marsden…

“Nothing,” he mumbles. “It was stupid. It’s ancient history now. You don’t wanna hear--”

--

“Yeah, I do,” Steve insists. “I want to know what happened, in California. That was it, wasn’t it?” He has thought about this several times before, but it never felt the right time to ask, they have been too busy being new to all this stuff. But the one time that Steve’s ever felt like this was an actual *relationship*, something *real* between them, was when Billy had told him about his mother, even if it was just a couple of sentences. That was real.

—

Steve doesn’t sound like he’s gonna back down. He wants to know. And Billy knows he can’t refuse him that now, so he slowly nods, trying to formulate some kind of narrative version of events he’s left unexamined in his mind for the seven months or so since they occurred. He sits down on the edge of the tub and leans his forearms on his knees, curling up small, defensive, to think. He feels Steve sit down beside him, his arm wrap around his waist and pull him closer,

and then he begins.

“When I first started… fucking around with guys,” he starts haltingly, pretty sure he has to go back to the start if the rest of this is going to make sense. “I was *so* careful,” he says. “I only ever fucked around with guys I met at clubs and parties, and never close to home. Never anyone my own age, who might go to school with me and recognize…

“It was lonely, and not nearly often enough to make me *happy*, but it worked. For a while. I kept my sex life separate from my ‘real life,’ and everything seemed to work out okay. For almost a year and a half I lived like that. But then, of course, I met someone…” When he can’t help but think of him now, on quiet nights when nothing’s there to distract him, Billy normally feels caught between a fond smile and a bitter rage. But now he just feels distant. Like he’s a memory from another life.

“Carlos,” he names him, and it feels odd to say the name with Steve right here, the water of a bath he’s drawn to soothe Steve’s sore muscles starting to reach the edges. He turns away partly to avoid that awkward feeling, partly to turn the faucet off and test the water with his hand. “I met him on the beach one spring and we hit it off so well…” Billy stays turned away. Doesn’t want to see Steve’s face while he talks about another guy like this. Especially knowing that deep down Carlos still means *something* to him, even if it’s nowhere near what Steve does. “That summer, you couldn’t get me off the waves for anything. We surfed constantly. I didn’t even know he was gay. I mean, a part of me probably did, but I wasn’t holding out hope or anything. We were just friends.

“Near the end of July, though, I ran into him at one of the nightclubs I went to sometimes to fuck. We talked for hours. We danced. I knew I shouldn’t get into it with him. Should just cut off contact. He knew my *family*.” Billy feels residual anger at himself bubble up at the memory. How sober he was that night. How he still made the worst decision possible.

A well-meaning but unlikeable part of his brain points out how similar the decision to get into things with Steve was, and he pushes it away, standing up again to face Steve now, to nudge him toward

the water with a hand on either shoulder. Steve isn't trying to meet his eyes now, but he doesn't resist Billy's push either. He lowers himself into the bath and Billy thinks about following just for the excuse not to look at his face, but he's not going to pussy out like that. Not now. He gathers courage and continues on to the hardest parts.

"Instead I let him fuck me," Billy says reticently, kneeling beside the bath and leaning on the cool porcelain for support. "And when he showed up at my house a couple days later to surf, we ended up exchanging blowjobs on the beach. We got reckless. *I* got reckless. I felt like, since my dad knew him, and liked him, we had an alibi for anything. In the end, I got so cocky I'd invite him over and we'd mess around with my dad in the other room.

"Must've been about a week before he walked in on us and, well… I think the only reason I survived that night was 'cause he didn't even want to look at me, let alone lay a hand on me." Billy lets out a shaky breath and takes the hand Steve is resting near his on the side, squeezes it and feels Steve squeeze him back.

"Max's dad had some kind of melt-down half a week later," he says, "but dad was already filing papers to sell the house by the time that shit happened. We were out of there the following Monday, and on our way to a state about as far away from beaches and Carlos and 'that liberal fag culture,' as humanly possible."

Billy turns and leans into Steve's shoulder. Presses a kiss to the warm skin there.

"Joke's on him though," he says earnestly. "I've never been more of a goddamn queer than I am around you, Steve Harrington. I swear to god."

--

Steve stays quiet for a little when Billy is finished, letting the words sink in. He's unsure of how to react to the outpour, doesn't want to ruin it by saying something dumb or thoughtless. Billy hasn't lied about a single word of it, Steve is sure of that. He remembers their first night in his car, when Billy asked what Steve wanted most, and

Steve had said, honesty. He understands now that Billy has made him a gift of his past, sordid details and all.

There were bits of Billy's story that made Steve smile, like the image of Billy surfing, glowing golden in Steve's imagination. Bits that made him feel possessive and yet, almost a little horny, even though his dick is still soft and spent and not accepting requests at the moment. Imagining Billy with another guy. Any guy. Some nameless dude in a club. Getting fucked. Not even knowing the other guy's name, maybe. And the bits about that other guy, *Carlos*, that felt… more.

Instead of saying something, Steve takes their intertwined fingers and kisses Billy's. Kissing always helps, especially when he has no clever words to say.

The thing with Billy's dad, though. He already knew it must have been bad, what happened in California, but knowing what he now knows of the man, god. How Billy must have felt, when his dad of all people walked in on him, with another guy. Someone he maybe, possibly, had been a little in love with. It reminds Steve once more how different it is for Billy, how much worse the whole "baby" scandal must have hit home. Makes him ashamed that he hasn't been trying harder to understand the whole Vicky thing. He wants to say how sorry he is for that. Doesn't want to dreg that shit up again, though, because they *just* got over it. But at least now he understands.

"Thank you," he says at length, though it makes him feel stupid again, because Billy has just given him this big thing, like the moon or France. And all Steve can think to say is that. He tilts his head to the side to kiss Billy's cheek, the corner of his mouth, the edge of his nose, anything he can reach.

"Are you coming in?" he asks then, suddenly aware that Billy is still kneeling outside the tub, reaching for a washcloth near the sink.

—

Billy meets Steve's eye and smiles softly, still feeling a little raw, faint, like the goddamn hickey on his neck.

“Do you want me to?” he asks.

--

“You still have to ask?” Steve says, raising his eyebrows, but his smile is warm and genuine. “Get your lazy ass in here.”

Steve leans back, sighs at the warmth seeping into him all over. Maybe Billy’s suggestion of a bath hadn’t been too bad. Not that he is going to admit it out loud.

—

Billy smiles as Steve seems to let the water and the salts do their magic on his poor muscles, but after a moment gives Steve’s hand an impatient squeeze.

“You gonna give me some room to sit, baby?” he suggests, pressing a kiss into Steve’s shoulder.

--

“Sit? No,” Steve says, taking Billy’s hand and pulling him closer, “Get in here already.”

Billy, for once in his life, obeys, and there’s a fair bit of shuffling and splashing until Steve has arranged Billy quite how he wants him, lying down with his back to Steve’s chest, a nice solid weight on top of him, and the best possible access to touch all of him, kiss Billy if he tilts his head to the side just so. Perfect.

“You’ll spend the night, yeah?” he asks, wrapping his legs around Billy, shifting to get into a comfortable position for his dick.

—

Billy slowly relaxes against Steve, adjusting sightly so his hair isn’t in his boyfriend’s face, and so the pendant on Steve’s chest isn’t nailing him *directly* in the spine. The thought of spending the night thrills him in a different way to how staying in the Harrington family cabin with Steve for a night had. This is Steve’s *house*. Where he *lives*. Probably has for his whole life. And Steve wants him to stay there

with him. *All night.*

"You still have to ask?" he murmurs, teasing, but he pulls Steve's arms tighter around his middle, and presses a sloppy kiss into his bicep. "Yeah, I'll stay."

--

"Mmmh," Steve hums his approval. He is feeling glowy again, like he's drifting in a cloud. Billy's body is right there, no one can stop him from touching him how he wants to (well, Billy *could*, technically, but he doesn't seem to want to, Steve is pleased to note), and he makes full use of the opportunity, running his hands over Billy's chest, the swell of his pecs, rubbing the tip of his fingers over one of Billy's nipples, then the other, tracing the ridges of Billy's abs, soft but firm under his touch. Dipping his finger into the shallowness of Billy's navel. He doesn't go near Billy's cock, this isn't about that. He's drinking his fill of being able to touch Billy, for all the times in the past when he wanted to, and couldn't.

He can feel Billy is drifting, too, and presses a kiss to his neck. "You know what? I think you should get a tattoo," he says softly, smiling at the silly thought. "Right… here." He trails his fingers over Billy's chest, stops on his heart. "*Private property. Hands off*."

—

Steve's protectiveness, his jealousy, makes Billy's head swim a little and he can't help but lean over a little to kiss him, bite his bottom lip gently.

"You're crazy, Harrington," he chuckles through a kiss.

—

"Crazy? Me?" Steve says, a little indignantly. "With people throwing themselves at you left and right?" Hell, even Tommy H keeps creeping back to Billy, no matter how much Billy abuses him.

"Not crazy," he insists. "We'll put another one here," he touches the soft dip near Billy's crotch. "*Last warning, slut*. And one on your ass, *That's it, you're dead*."

—

Billy turns his head to the side and meets Steve's eyes with a slow smile.

"Mm my ass, huh? That's the final line?"

He reaches over the side of the bath and grabs the hand towel he'd got earlier. Dips it in the water before taking it to his own chest, washing off the residue of sweat.

"And who's gonna pay for these things, huh?" he challenges teasingly. "Tattoos aren't cheap unless you *want* them to look smudged to shit."

—

"Oh, *that's* the only reason you can think of not to get a tattoo?" Steve smiles, shaking his head. He takes the washcloth from Billy, dips it into the water once more before slowly running it over Billy's chest, cleaning him off with care. "Great, we can go get them at the weekend, then. What do you say?"

He smiles into the skin of Billy's neck, nibbles on his earlobe. "And one more on your forehead. *Steve Harrington's boyfriend*."

--

Billy snorts.

"I think that falls into the category of things even a massive rock wouldn't buy you, sweetheart. The only needle I've ever wanted near my face was the one that gave me this." He indicates the dagger-like earring on his left ear. "You'll have to claim what's yours some other way, big guy," he winks.

--

"Alright," Steve says, concentrating some more on running the wet cloth over Billy's chest. It's not like Billy is actually doing any of that, anyway. Steve knows they are just playing, the talk of massive rocks and tattoos doesn't mean a thing. Not in the long run. Steve has a

vague idea of what lies in store for him, in a few months. A cushy job in insurance and some apartment in town paid for by his grandfather's estate, and all that adult stuff. The things he once thought might appeal to Nancy probably mean nothing to Billy. He doesn't have the faintest idea what Billy wants to do after graduation. Probably leave town before the ink on his diploma runs dry.

It makes Steve shiver and hug Billy closer to him. They have this, for now, at least.

"Maybe we should go to bed," he says, mumbles it into Billy's hair. "Water's getting cold."

—

Billy nods, begins to move a little, but the movement brings them both into contact with cold water, and Steve groans and pulls him close again.

"You're gonna have to let me get up if you wanna join me in that soft fuckin' bed of yours, baby," Billy points out, and pulls himself up by the towel bar in the shower. He hisses at the cold and steps out onto the bathmat, grabbing a towel for Steve. "Alright, come on, Stevie, I've got ya," he teases lightly, offering a strong arm.

--

Steve follows without complaint. Now that they are getting out of the tepid water, exhaustion is settling in his limbs like lead. What a fucking day. He winces when he climbs out of the bath, suddenly reminded of that particular soreness. He had almost forgotten about that. "Good thing basketball season is over," he mutters, smiling crookedly at Billy.

—

Billy wraps the towel around Steve's shoulders and dries him off a little just to touch him more.

"Mmyeah, good thing," he agrees, taking the opportunity to slide his hands down Steve's back to his ass for a quick fondle. Before Steve can playfully slap him away though, he turns to reach down and

unplug the stopper on the tub, then reaches for a towel of his own.

--

Steve is feeling so tired not even Billy leaning over the tub makes him put much energy into ogling his boyfriend's ass. No more than usual, anyway. He wishes Billy would towel him off some more, because even lifting his arms has turned into a major endeavor. He's mostly dry anyway, he decides, and starts walking back into his bedroom, goes to the closet to find something to wear. Billy will need something to sleep in, too, he realizes with a smile. After he slips into a t-shirt and boxers he grabs a nice, worn old t-shirt and pajama bottoms for Billy. Lays them out on the bed, before going back to the bathroom to brush his teeth. "You want a toothbrush? Should be one under the sink," he says, and has to laugh at how domestic that sounds.

—

Billy tosses his used towel over the edge of the nearly empty tub and grabs a toothbrush from the indicated place. Steve squeezes some toothpaste out for him, and they brush for a minute in silence, eyes meeting in the mirror every once in a while prompting little smiles and playful face-pulling. Billy stops midway through, mouth foamy, to press a teasing kiss on Steve's cheek, and cackles when he flinches away and wipes the toothpaste off his skin.

When he finishes, Billy wraps his arms around Steve's waist and inspects him in the mirror, tugging at the comfortably worn fabric of the t-shirt, *Hawkins Middle School Swim Team* written across the chest in faded letters.

"Nice pjs, baby," he smirks, running a hand down softly from the top of the letters. "So *that's* how you maintain this body with all the shit you eat," he teases, and leaves his side to return to the bedroom.

--

"Shuddup," Steve mutters at Billy's retreating back, but the sentiment behind it, the offhand way Billy implies he likes Steve's body, still makes him smile. He washes up quickly, jealous of every minute with

Billy he's missing, and returns to his bedroom, where Billy has already climbed into bed, but the clothes Steve laid out are still at the edge of the mattress, untouched.

"Those were for you," he complains good-naturedly. "Put them on, or you'll be cold."

—

"Get in with me or I'll be cold," Billy counters. But Steve tosses the pajama bottoms at Billy with a mothering look, and Billy can't resist him. He sighs and reaches under the covers to dress himself, doing a little awkward dance.

"Now will you join me? Or would you rather I take the guest bedroom?" Billy mocks, holding the right side of the covers open for Steve to slide in next to him.

—

"Maybe, if your feet are like ice again," Steve mumbles and gets into bed, wiggling to find a comfortable position until Billy's half under him, his broad chest a nice place to lay his head.

—

Billy wraps his arm around Steve and smirks down into his hair, kissing it.

"Your mom said you always were a very physically affectionate boy," he remembers, choosing to ignore the fact that tonight alone he's initiated at *least* half of the "physical affection."

"How's your ass feelin', pretty boy?" he asks instead, reaching his right hand down to touch what of it he can reach.

—

"Mmmmh, okay I guess," Steve replies, and he does feel good, though a lot of it may have to do with the warm, soft body underneath his and the way Billy is touching him, slow and sweet, and the fact that he doesn't have to move, not tonight. But the thoughts of everything

they have said and done today are still reeling in his head, making it hard to rest. He turns, looks up at Billy, and even in the dim light, he can see that Billy is looking back at him. Which settles his mind. He wouldn't have wanted to say it if Billy was already asleep.

"I love you," he says, earnestly and without blinking. Presses a quick kiss to Billy's lips. "Good night."

--

"Goodnight, sweetheart," Billy murmurs, feeling featherlight and comfortably heavy all at once.

Notes for the Chapter:

> Billy POV by ficsandfuckery (women-seem-wicked on tumblr), Steve POV by blithesea (bites-heal on tumblr).

5. Breakfast in America

Summary for the Chapter:

> Saturday morning at the Harrington's. Coffee, omelettes and thoughts of parenticide. Normal stuff.

Billy falls asleep quicker than he expects to. After the physical and emotional trials of the day, though, it's hardly surprising that Steve's warm body, the sound of his breathing, lulls Billy into unconsciousness almost immediately, Steve's *I love you* ringing softly in Billy's ears. He sleeps deeper than he has in months, surrounded by Steve's warmth, the scent of him on the sheets, but that doesn't stop him from waking up with a jerk some time around three, when Steve's elbow suddenly nails him in the side.

He isn't sure where he is when he opens his eyes. The dark room, lit up slightly from outside by the brightness of the moon, so different from his own. But the presence of Steve pressed against his front grounds him again when he shifts and lets out a soft moan. At first, Billy thinks it's a sex dream. Smirks a little and pulls Steve closer to his hips. But Steve tenses in his arms and this time his moan is louder. *Scared.*

"Shit… Steve?"

Steve's breathing comes ragged and suddenly he's clinging to Billy's arm while trying to push him away, muttering "nononononono, not them…" Billy lets Steve push him away a bit, fully awake now and frowning as he tries to figure out what the best course of action is here. *He* would be pissed if someone woke him up now, pulling him into their arms and trying to calm him down when all he wants to do is hit something or cry, but then he's not Steve. In fact, that's one of the many appeals of Steve. He's so very *not Billy*.

"Steve?" Billy says again, this time a little louder, but still cautious, catching one of the hands Steve's knotted in his bedsheets and holding it tight in his own. "Hey, wake up," he breathes, leaning down dangerously close to his tossing body and smoothing a hand over the frown lines on Steve's tormented face. Steve *whimpers*. *Fuck*.

“Baby, come on,” Billy begs now, pressing his lips to Steve’s jaw, and gets a knee to the thigh for his efforts. *Jesus. Okay. Desperate times.*

Billy rolls over and pins Steve’s flailing limbs down under his solid weight. Holds his arms tight, and tangles his legs with Steve’s. Steve’s sounds get more desperate and he’s actually sweating now, but Billy just leans down and presses his lips to Steve’s exposed neck softly. Kisses him there, muttering scattered, nonsense reassurances, until Steve goes limp under his body, and Billy can feel him start to jerk slowly awake.

“Shhh come on pretty boy, you’re okay,” he promises, slowly letting Steve’s hands go before slowly starting to move up off him.

--

There’s dripping, dripping in the tunnels while Steve is running, trying to catch up with someone, on the move, only his limbs are like lead, like something is dragging him down, and he can’t shake himself free, not even when there’s a pile of (bodies) something in his way, he’s not looking, not noticing the little kid sneakers, baseball hats, bandanas, he has to *move*, has to find help, feels the cold ever creeping closer—

Steve moans, tries to go faster, but his feet won’t even get off the ground and he—

“Shhh. You’re fine, baby, don’t worry…” Whispered words, soft touches, the sensation of a ton of weight holding him down. His body rages against the feeling of being held back, one last time, before his mind jerks awake.

“Billy,” he mumbles, doesn’t even have to open his eyes to know he’s there, but when Billy moves as if to get off him and put some space between them again, Steve clings to him desperately. “Sorry,” he mutters miserably against Billy’s skin, “I couldn’t save them, I’m sorry…”

—

Billy’s blood runs cold, and he lets Steve pull him back on top of him,

but his mind is racing. *What the hell kind of shit are you dreaming, pretty boy?*

"No," he shakes his head, pushing hair off of Steve's sweaty brow and kissing it. "It's okay. Jesus, Steve, it's okay." And then, because he can't help the curiosity, "Who couldn't you save?"

--

"Dustin," Steve moans, the insides of his eyelids still imprinted with the vivid image of his friend's lifeless features. "Max, Lucas, Mike… all of them." He groans, wipes at his eyes to get rid of that scene. When he opens his eyes, he sees Billy looking down at him with a strange look, and slowly starts to realize that he is awake. With Billy in his bed.

He blinks, tries to think straight, has to think. Billy doesn't know about all that stuff. Billy *shouldn't* know all about that stuff. If he ever dreams of Billy lying in a dark tunnel like a heap of rags, water dripping into his face, his eyes… Steve shudders, pulls Billy closer. "Just a dream," he mumbles, mostly to himself. "Fuck, it's just a dream."

—

Billy covers Steve with his weight, leans into him like he seems to need right now, but doesn't return the aimless, open kisses on his neck. *Max?… Sinclair? That's who he's dreaming about?* He shakes his head a bit as if to clear it, and slips his fingers behind Steve's ear, running them through his soft, thick hair soothingly.

"You're okay, babe," he mutters. "Your *kids* are okay." It's a little taunting, but only lovingly. And after all, if he thinks about it it does sort of square with what he knows of Steve's personality that he'd be just *that* protective of kids he's connected to only tangentially. *If* they were in danger, of course. Which, as far as he knows, they've never been. Not all of them, like that, except--

Billy remembers aching fists, pounding pulse, and Steve's sweet face going all *firey* when he pushed Sinclair into the wall. Sickness churns in his gut and he wants to ask: *who couldn't you save them from?* But

he doesn't dare.

Instead he rolls off Steve, and before he can whine at the loss of contact, pulls him close again, face to face on their sides, one of Billy's legs thrown over Steve's pulling him closer.

"Shhh," he soothes, realizing he hasn't soothed or been soothed like this since he was five, and hoping it doesn't show, that he doesn't accidentally baby Steve too much here. "You're okay, Harrington. It was all a dream," he breathes, running a hand up and down his still shaking back.

--

Steve wants to close his eyes and just vanish in the soft touches, the soothing voice. He clears his throat, inches closer into Billy's space. "Sorry I woke you up," he says, not meeting Billy's eyes, looking down at his chest instead. He puts his hand there to feel Billy's heart beat solid and steady.

"I never know when… I used to wake up more easy, and sometimes they don't come back after I take a drive…" But there hasn't been much of that lately, just nights that leave him waking up exhausted, and in a cold sweat.

"Think you can go back to sleep?"

—

Billy breathes deep, pushing intentionally into Steve's touch.

"Don't worry 'bout it pretty boy," he says, pulling the stone from his pendant around from the back of Steve's neck where it's fallen, half-choking him. "I'll sleep when you sleep. Just tell me what you need, babe. I'm--" a yawn cuts him off deceitfully, "I'm wide awake."

--

"Wide awake, huh," Steve smiles, and leans in for a kiss, and another, because it seems like Billy's lips on his work best at calming him down. He should always keep Billy in his bed. Just in case of more nightmares.

“I just need you,” he says, pressing a quick kiss to Billy’s face, to his jaw, gets a mouthful of stubble for it. Smiles. “Just need you to close your eyes, and stay with me. And if I dream of something bad again,” he closes his eyes, pulls the comforter closer over them both, “just, mmmh. Come and help me…” He trails off, yawning, already half gone again, but still surrounded by the comfort of Billy’s presence. He can face monsters together with Billy. Billy would have his back.

—

Billy hums and shakes his head sleepily. Tucks Steve in against his chest and closes his eyes too.

“What, help you save your brats?” he asks with a slow, quiet chuckle. *What better to protect you all from Billy Hargrove your enemy, than Billy Hargrove your boyfriend?* He presses a kiss to Steve’s forehead and lets his lips linger there. Mutters some more half-baked phrases of comfort as he strokes the tension out of Steve’s back, and tries to stay awake until Steve’s dropped back off to sleep against his chest. If he does, it’s only by about a second. They’re both exhausted though, and it only takes a minute before they’re both dead asleep once again.

--

Morning has Steve wake up soft and warm, too warm almost, with the hot body of his boyfriend wrapped around him like a sleepy octopus. “Mmmmmh,” he mutters, tries to catch the last of his dream and go back to sleep, but there’s too much going on. Billy’s breath on his neck makes him feel too hot and paired with the insistence of his sleepy erection, half-pressed against Billy’s leg, and the fact that he really has to piss, makes falling asleep practically impossible.

“Hey,” he whispers, tries to shove Billy off him gently, but only manages to make Billy grumble and hold him tighter. Steve sighs. “Baby,” he says softly against Billy’s ear. Billy grunts, but doesn’t seem to listen. “You have to let go of me,” Steve breathes, kisses Billy’s brow. With some gentle pressure, he manages to disentangle himself and go to the bathroom.

He stretches a little, after, yawns at himself in the mirror. At first he’s a bit confused at the soreness in his ass, but once it all comes home to

him, everything they did last night, he can't help but grin. The details of it come rushing back to him while he washes his hands and brushes his teeth, and, *fuck.* It's hard to tell now if his dick is still hard from waking up, or from thinking of Billy *fucking* him.

—

Billy groans and opens his eyes. Stretches out against the bed and glances around the room for the first time since Steve led him here the night before. It's painfully tacky, and for a second Billy wonders if he knows Steve Harrington at all, before he reassures himself there's no way the decor was put there by anyone but Mrs. Harrington.

He sits up and yawns, tries to make less of a mess out of his hair. Thinks about joining Steve in the bathroom, he could use a shower, but his stomach rumbles and Billy gets a better idea. He quickly stands and snatches the old t-shirt Steve set out for him last night from the back of a chair.

Pancakes, he thinks. *Steve probably likes pancakes. And there has to be stuff to make them here*. He steps out into the hall, pulling the shirt on over his head in defense against the cold of the house as he goes. *And coffee. Fuck, I could murder a cup of coffee.*

--

To think that her husband had been worried to leave Stevie all alone in the house all weekend, Linda Harrington thinks distractedly. As if their boy was one to plan secret parties… There is that one car sitting in the drive, but it only seems to be the only one, and when they had come home late the previous night there had been no teenagers sleeping on every available surface, the place was spick and span, like always. Well, except for the half-eaten fast food on the coffee table. The boy really was too accustomed to living with a maid. But with that the only thing, Linda easily convinced her husband that Stevie had just invited over a friend, and that he was well within his rights to do that with such a big lonely house to himself. She is standing by the kitchen counter, waiting for the coffee machine when her boy shuffles in behind her.

“Morning, honey,” she says, and gives a little start when she looks up to see the puzzled face of a stranger. No, not a stranger. Steve’s friend. The one with the blue car.

“Oh,” she laughs softly, “I’m sorry, I thought you were…” She blinks at him. He hasn’t said a word yet, just stands rooted to the spot. Whatever can be the matter with him?

“Would you like some coffee, hon? Is Steve still in bed? He really should take better care of his guests, I’m sure I didn’t raise him like that.” She smiles vaguely. “Do you play basketball, too?”

—

Billy feels like he’s under a spotlight. He smells like sex still, doesn’t he? *Fuck*. He thought Steve had said his parents were out of town! It’s pure luck that he remembers to smile and nod in answer to her questions.

“Yeah… yeah, I’m on the team too,” he agrees hesitantly, taking the cup of coffee she hands him on autopilot. *What the hell is she asking that for? This woman is seriously batty. I gotta get out of here.*

“Oh! Let me give you some for Stevie, too!” Linda stops him, pouring Steve a mug and adding tons of milk and sugar to it with a smile. She offers him some too, but he shakes his head that black is fine, and beats a hasty retreat before she can ask him anything else.

--

Steve is thrown a little when he comes back to the bed, ready to kiss Billy awake and wake him up properly, every part of him, and Billy isn’t there. But he doesn’t have to worry for long, soon Billy comes back into the room, clutching two mugs.

“Coffee!” Steve sighs, starry-eyed. Billy really loves him. But Billy is looking white as a sheet. “You alright?” he wonders.

—

“Holy shit, Harrington, you better not have known about this,” Billy groans, pushing Steve’s coffee into his hands. “I just ran into your

mom downstairs," he hisses.

—

"What?" Steve is puzzled, then realizes what Billy just said, frowns. "Are you kidding me? You think I'd do *that*, after everything?" He glares at Billy and takes a sip of coffee. Pulls a face. He always takes his coffee black. Still, the sweet hotness instantly makes him feel better, and he manages to look at Billy freaking out before him with a little more perspective.

"They told me they were gone till Sunday night, honestly," he says. "But it's not the end of the world. We'll just tell them you slept over. They won't mind." *They won't care* would be the more honest answer.

—

Billy breathes through his nose and nods. Takes a sip of his own coffee and groans a little because *shit*, he didn't know coffee could be this good.

"Okay," he says, "Just, they won't tell anyone, will they? Their friends who have kids or whatever? Babe, if it gets out I was here…"

—

Let me tell you about how little my parents know of my life, Steve wants to say. *My mom kept calling Nancy my Bio lab partner for nearly a year. My dad gave me a fucking baseball kit for Christmas. They probably don't even know your name.*

"Nah, don't worry about it. They spend most of their time at the Country Club in Linley because the links here in Hawkins aren't pampered enough." He tries to sound like he's joking, but.

—

Billy hears the bitterness in Steve's voice, and feels bad for doubting him. He glances at the shut bedroom door on instinct, and leans in to kiss his boyfriend deeply for just a moment.

"I hate your parents," he confesses. "So much for lying in bed all day

and fucking until we can't move."

—

Steve sighs softly, lets Billy kiss him. Invites him into his own mouth with soft, languid kisses, both of them aware that it's probably the last time they will get to kiss like that today.

"Come on," he says, takes Billy's hand, tugs. "Let's see why the hell they're here. Maybe they'll leave again soon. And breakfast. We should get breakfast. I'll make you something nice. An omelette?"

—

Billy smiles into his last deep kiss, and gives Steve's ass a squeeze.

"Yeah, sure, pretty boy, sounds good," he says. "You go ahead, I'll meet you down there," he kisses Steve again and tugs away, heading for the bathroom.

—

Steve quickly moves between Billy and the bathroom door, and kisses him, throwing his arm around him, kisses him like it's the last time. And if it is the last time, for today at least, who can blame him? Billy makes a show of grumbling and pushing an elbow into his ribs, but he is smiling, enjoying the attention. Steve's shirt is clinging to him like a second skin, it pretty much makes Steve's mouth water just to look at him. "If we could," he says in a low voice, "I'd get you out of those jams and fuck you senseless."

Still, even if his parents don't make a habit of coming into his room, the whole thing is a bit too risky even for him. So Steve presses one last kiss to Billy's lips. "Don't you dare shimmy down the drainpipe," he says with a smile. "I'm not gonna eat that omelette on my own."

Billy pulls a face and closes the door in his face. Still smiling, Steve makes his way downstairs. His mother wanders into the kitchen just as he opens the fridge to hunt for some eggs.

"Oh, sweetie," his mother beams, drifting into the kitchen. "Isn't it great? Your dad wanted to stay until the conference ended, but I

made him leave after the banquet last night. We drove all night!"

"That's awesome, mom," Steve sighs. He rummages through the fridge for some cheese. Dissatisfied with his response, his mother leans against him, putting her arms around his waist. "Well, we couldn't miss your big game, honey? Right?"

Steve swallows. Is suddenly glad Billy isn't here. "The game?"

"Yeah, the last game of the season, who are you playing again, Northwell?"

He can't look at her beaming face now. Just leans into the fridge, breathes in some cool air. Comes back with as even a face as he can manage. "The game was yesterday, mom," he says lightly, nudging her hip with his.

"Really?" she blinks, clearly disappointed. "Well, how did it go? Did you win?"

Steve shrugs, like it doesn't matter. "Yeah, we won."

"Well, that's wonderful, sweetie!" Apparently her faith in the right of the world has been restored. Steve is glad he has his eggs to concentrate on. She pats his shoulder affectionately and drifts out of the kitchen again, clearly already forgotten that Steve has a guest. He didn't even have to make anything up. Though he isn't quite sure if he is relieved or disappointed at that.

--

After giving up hope on his hair entirely - there are two bits in the back that just *won't behave* - Billy shuffles out of Steve's bathroom and grabs a rubber band from his desk, trying to at least tie it up out of the way. He considers the bedroom window, even glances out of it to see that although it'd be tricky, there *is* a path down the wall he could take. But Steve specifically asked him not to do that, and Billy's not feeling inclined to intentionally disappoint his boyfriend after everything that's happened now. He sucks his teeth and steps out, back into the hall.

The t-shirt he's wearing is way too tight, and now that he knows Mrs.

and probably Mr. Harrington are somewhere in the house he feels almost naked, so when he makes it to the kitchen without running into either of them he breathes a sigh of relief. And Steve is standing at the stove, boxers and that old t-shirt - which is riding up, showing off a sliver of his back as he reaches over the stove for something in a cabinet - so Billy can't help himself, he sneaks up behind Steve and slips his arms around him with a smirk. Grabs the spatula from him before he can drop it in shock, and presses a kiss to his neck.

"Hi," he hums, knocking their hips together softly.

--

"Hey," Steve says, blushing a bit. Because it's apparently one thing to get fucked by Billy in his own bed, and quite a different thing to get a kiss he never expected over some eggs. He can't help smiling, pulling Billy closer for just one second before he lets him go.

"Love what you've done with your hair," he teases, pulls on the little tail at the back of Billy's head. Gently nudges him towards one of the high bar stools near the counter. It feels a bit odd, Billy for once not being the cautious one. Not seeming to care if Steve's mom comes in and catches them necking. Steve clears his throat. "You, um. You like mushrooms? Or…"

--

Billy allows Steve to push him away, remembering where they are, and forces himself to sit down at the counter.

"Yeah, mushrooms are fine, pretty boy" he says. "I can't believe you're actually making omelettes. You're so domestic, Harrington," he smirks, ignoring the fact that if Steve's cockblocking mother hadn't interrupted him earlier, he'd be doing roughly the same thing for *him*. He takes the salt and pepper shakers on the counter in hand for something to do, and gives them a turn. They're shaped like chickens. Billy is simultaneously repulsed and amused.

--

It shouldn't make him flush, Billy calling him domestic, but it does,

right along with the twinge in his ass that still keeps reminding him of what they did last night. Steve tries his best to hide it, looking down at the frying pan.

“Excuse me for being able to feed myself,” he grumbles, deftly dicing up a couple of brown mushrooms and adding them to the pan. “And if you want to get to eat my eggs, you better behave, Hargrove.”

--

Billy smirks and sets the chickens down on the counter again. One of them is bending down to eat some seeds or something off the ground. Billy turns that one so it looks like it’s eating the other one’s ass.

“Yes sir,” Billy smirks, and takes a sip of his coffee. Colder now, but still *so* good. “Hey, did you figure out why they came home early?” he asks, nodding over his shoulder toward the invisible but oppressive presence of his parents.

--

Steve nods, but doesn’t elaborate. Instead, he grabs a plate and neatly slides the omelette on it, then places it in front of Billy with a little flourish. “Viola,” he says, hoping Billy won’t ask him to provide any details. “You want ketchup with that?”

He doesn’t wait for Billy’s answer, just gets some from the fridge and plops it down next to Billy’s plate, then turns towards the pan again to fry some eggs for himself, too. All perfectly good reasons for not looking Billy in the eyes for a couple of minutes.

--

Billy watches the tension in Steve’s shoulders, frowns as he tries to figure out what it means - if he’s imagining it. He takes a bite of the omelette and groans out loud.

“This is awesome, Stevie,” he praises. “You oughta make me breakfast more often.”

He wants to ask Steve more about his parents, but if he’s not providing it now there must be some reason. If anyone can

understand that it's Billy. He picks up the ass-eating chicken and adds some pepper to his food before taking another bite.

--

"I'll make you breakfast whenever you stay over, if you like," Steve replies eagerly, then frowns a bit because that may have sounded a little desperate. He wants to point out that Billy will have to go the whole nine yards to get eggs cooked for him. Steve sprinkles some cheese on his omelette, and lets it sit for a moment, turning to Billy and leaning in, his thumb smudging over the corner of Billy's mouth.

"You got a bit of something there," he says softly, wants to kiss him so badly, see how Billy tastes together with eggs. But he holds himself back.

--

Billy sticks his tongue out. Licks Steve's finger teasingly.

"Go Tigers!" a lower, less animated version of Steve's voice grumbles from behind them, and they jump apart a little, Steve glancing over his shoulder as he returns to the stove. Mr. Harrington looks so unnervingly like Steve could in thirty or forty years, that Billy's mouth goes a little dry because *holy shit he's hot*. The years have chiseled his features a bit more than Steve's sweet softness, given him a kind of authority that makes Billy feel embarrassingly eager to do what he's told.

He doesn't appear to have noticed anything off about how they were standing when he came in though, in fact, doesn't see Billy until he's been staring for a solid couple seconds. His blue eyes glance up and catch Billy's on him, the one feature that makes him so clearly *not* his son, and it's all Billy can do to smile awkwardly and nod in greeting before turning quickly away because he doesn't *feel* like he's blushing, but he very well might be.

"So *this* is the owner of the Camaro parked in my driveway," Mr. Harrington says, and years of dealing with his own father has Billy almost anticipating a slap. He turns a sheepish smile on Mr. Harrington and swallows the coffee in his mouth.

“Sorry, sir,” he says, grimacing.

--

“*Dad*,” Steve chides, this isn’t how he’d want any friend of his to meet his father, let alone his boyfriend. Not that his father knows it, but still. “You don’t even have to go around the driveway to get to the garage…”

His father walks over to the coffee-machine, frowns at the empty pot. “I was merely making small-talk, since you haven’t cared to introduce your friend yet--”

Steve hunches his shoulders. “This is Billy,” he says mechanically, like it doesn’t mean anything. “He’s on the basketball team with me.” He wants to launch into an explanation on why Billy had to stay over the previous night, but bites his tongue. That would probably just make things look way more guilty, and his dad has an uncanny knack of knowing when Steve is bullshitting. So he keeps his eyes on his eggs. “You want an omelette, dad? I got porcini mushrooms and bacon.”

His dad grumbles assent and busies himself with making more coffee. “I’m not much of a fan of Chevrolets,” he says, “But you seem to take good care of yours. It looks like quite the specimen.” Steve can tell this is a peace offering, but he casts a worried look at Billy, not sure if he understands it as such, too.

--

It should be, I’d only been saving up for it from the day they came out in ‘79, Billy thinks with a little pride and a little bitterness. The fact that his dad contributed only the cost of registering the thing but still acts like he owns it, can take it away at any moment, will forever be a stone in Billy’s gut.

“I do, sir,” he says, glancing at the kitchen window like he can see the car out there right now. “Drove her ‘cross country from California in August and didn’t have any problems at all.”

The fact that Mr. Harrington looks at least a little impressed at that

makes Billy feel just a little less nervous, but still he decides to try and minimize the impression he makes on the man. The less this guy knows about Steve's *new friend*, the better it will be for all of them.

--

Steve hands his father a plate and is just about to busy himself with finally, finally cooking some eggs for himself, when his father asks between bites, "So, are you feeling confident about the big game tonight, boys?"

Fuck. Steve closes his eyes for a second. Wishes Billy wasn't right *there*. "Um," he starts, and doesn't know how to go on.

--

Billy glances at Steve's suddenly tense back. *What is he talking about?* he wants to ask, but Steve isn't turning around. He keeps his own face turned away from Harrington Sr.'s, not knowing what to say. *Yes, 'cause we already won? No, it was yesterday? Yes, I really think tonight is going to go well?*

Steve, fucking say something, babe.

He shovels egg into his mouth to avoid having to speak.

--

Steve can see his father's eyes narrow. He is probably wondering how their coach is letting them get away with that kind of defeatist attitude. Since Billy isn't saying anything, just carefully keeping his head down, it falls to Steve to bring up the news.

"Actually," he says, staring down at the frying pan, trying to keep his voice light and unaffected. "The game was yesterday. But we won. Great, huh?"

He knows his father isn't going to agree.

--

Mr. Harrington doesn't say anything to that for a moment, but Billy

doesn't have to look at him to feel the anger crackle off of him in waves. He's all too familiar with that energy. Thinks maybe he's holding it back only because they have a guest. Is grateful at least for that. *His* dad, probably wouldn't, though he'd pull Billy into another room.

"Huh," his voice is tight and his fork hits the plate too loud. "Your *mother* seemed to think it was tonight. We drove all night to get here. Did she tell you that?"

Billy feels sick. Wants to step between Steve and his father and tell him to fuck right off, take his stupid European car and get the hell out, but he doesn't.

--

"Yeah," Steve admits, keeping his eyes down. And he fucking *knows* he told his mother what day the game was. Could have sworn she was even listening at the time. Well, obviously, she hadn't been. He swallows. "I guess I must have told her the wrong date?" he offers, though it sounds weak in his own ears.

His father pushes the plate away from him in disgust. "Unbelievable," he mutters, throwing Steve a hard glare and getting up from his chair, not even bothering to acknowledge Billy as he stomps out of the kitchen. Steven winces when he heard his voice boom outside. "Linda! The game was yesterday! Did you know this? Do you have *any* idea--"

The tirade trails off as his dad makes his way deeper into the house, and Steve switches off the stove, pushes his eggs onto a plate. Stares down at them. He's not really hungry anymore.

--

"Shit," Billy breathes, glancing over his shoulder after Harrington Sr. with a dirty look. "You alright, baby?" He asks, sliding his hand across the counter to brush Steve's. "Let's get out of here, huh? I'll suck your dick in the woods or something."

--

Steve has to chuckle at that offer, almost against his will. “You’re such a good boyfriend,” he mutters, squeezing Billy’s hand. “You know just how to cheer me up.” He isn’t feeling it, though, not really. Hopes Billy won’t hold it against him if he asks for a rain check.

“You want any of this?” he asks, pointing at his plate full of cooling omelette. When Billy shakes his head, Steve gets up, dumps the eggs in the trash, scrapes down his father’s plate for good measure, and puts them in the dishwasher. “C’mon,” he mutters, takes Billy’s hand just to squeeze it once, before letting go again. “Let’s go upstairs. They’ll be at it for awhile.”

--

Billy follows Steve up the stairs, the raised voices from some room in the house getting louder for a moment and reminding Billy vividly of how his own parents used to fight - except his mom never shouted back. Mrs. Harrington seems to be holding her own.

He gives Steve’s ass a pat as they make it to his room, and pushes the door closed behind himself, tugging Steve back into him for a moment. Something about all of the madness downstairs is making him feel the need to touch Steve like a pain in his chest. He kisses him almost like an afterthought, just wanting to hold him close and be held back.

--

Steve clings to Billy, though he knows he’s overcompensating now, but it feels so good, having Billy hold him after all that shit with his parents. Billy still wanting to.

“I’m sorry,” Steve mutters in a brief pause between kisses. “I didn’t want you to see that, if I had known, I’d have…” He isn’t quite sure what he’d have done, only knows that the whole scene had felt so much worse because Billy was there to witness it.

--

"Oh my god, Steve, shut up,” Billy mutters against his lips. “That *wasn’t* your fault. And if you’re embarrassed about your parents, don’t

be. My dad probably wouldn't even remember that I'm on the *team* if he hadn't bitched for three weeks about the cost of the jersey." *Or he would, but only because it's the one thing I'm doing right now that he doesn't think I'm shit at.*

He slips his hands up under Steve's shirt and strokes his fingers over the warm skin of him.

"Don't be sorry, baby," he growls. "Don't."

--

Steve instantly feels bad, because his parents may be assholes, but compared to Billy's dad… he doesn't even want to go there. "Alright," he accedes, "I'm not fucking sorry." He leans against Billy, his face against the side of Billy's neck. Wishing they could just go back to bed. He tugs at Billy's hair, tied up with a piece of elastic. "What's this about, huh?" he asks, desperate to change the subject. "You getting a new look?"

—

Billy swats Steve's hand away from the tight rubber band on his hair.

"Ouch. Asshole," he hisses, biting Steve's ear in retaliation. But he's smiling, and kisses it right after. "Yeah," he hums with a little laugh. "I was going for an unwashed, *slept in an office supply store* sort of look. You like it, baby?"

--

"Yeah," Steve replies, smiling back. "You could still improve it, though. Maybe a paperclip earring. Or some white-out for your nails." He nibbles at Billy's neck, steering clear of his actual earring, which he might just swallow one day if he isn't careful.

—

Billy snorts, but Steve's mouth on him feels so nice that he can't help but let his eyes fall a bit closed and lean into the touch. His wandering hands find their way under the fabric of Steve's thin boxer shorts and he groans.

“Mmf I don’t know why I did that honestly,” he says of his hair. “I’m afraid to pull it out now. It’s so tangled in there. I just--” he turns and kisses Steve’s lips hungrily. “My hair was so fucked up. Didn’t want you to see me like that. You and your fucking perfect, sexy bed-head,” he pulls back a little and ruffles Steve’s hair, which is messy to be sure, but in a perfect way that’s entirely unfair to everyone else.

--

Steve preens a little, smiles. It doesn’t matter if Billy just says nice things about his hair to make him feel better, because it’s *working*. He runs his fingers over the back of Billy’s head, over the little tail.

“Mmmh, if it doesn’t come out, we’ll just have to cut it off,” he teases, smiles at Billy’s stormy expression. Kisses the frown. “Here, let me get it for you.”

He moves Billy, half-turns him to get a better angle and carefully starts to unpick the rubber band. “Oh, stop fussing,” he says when Billy gets impatient, and plants a kiss on Billy’s nape once he is done. “There.” He cards his fingers through Billy’s hair. “Now you’re rock’n’roll again.”

—

“Patronizing bastard,” Billy grumbles, shaking his fingers through his hair to try and return it to some kind of presentable shape. “You’re more rock n’ roll than I am anyway, *Elvis*,” he teases, turning and giving Steve’s hair a brush with his fingers. But he presses a kiss into his lips before he passes him for the clothes he left on the floor last night.

--

“Well, clearly rock’n’roll is the way to be, then,” Steve says smugly, turning and following Billy, frowning when he sees him reaching for his clothes. “You’re not going already?” he asks, smile quickly dying. Obviously, Billy couldn’t stay here until they both grow old and grey, he knows that. But. Knowing it and seeing it are two entirely different things.

--

Billy pulls the borrowed t-shirt off with considerable difficulty, and stretches a little before unceremoniously shucking Steve's pajama pants down his thighs and stepping out of them.

"Well, I've gotta go sometime, don't I?" he says, knowing exactly what his being completely naked is doing to Steve and relishing it for a moment as he works an imaginary crick out of his back before reaching for his jeans.

—

Before Billy can put on those jeans, Steve is on him, all over him, slings his arms around Billy's waist, his mouth latching onto Billy's neck, one of his hands gripping Billy's cock and balls. "I don't know, do you?" he asks, voice a little petulant, because he's not ready to give this up yet. He gives Billy's cock a squeeze. "Are you absolutely *sure*?"

--

Billy shudders as his cock reacts much too quickly to Steve's attention, and presses into the mouth on his neck.

"Oh fuck, Steve—" he gasps, trying only a little to pull back. "Jesus."

But that's all the complaint he's capable of before he pushes into Steve's hand on his cock and pulls Steve's mouth into more of him with a desperate hand in the back of his hair, tossing his clothes onto the bed without a care.

"Fuck, you're so hot, baby."

—

"Me?" Steve murmurs against Billy's skin, bumps his own cock against Billy's bare ass while he gives Billy's cock some much-deserved attention. Fuck, maybe he should get the lube for this. "Have you even *looked* at yourself?" He gets an idea, turns both of them, walks Billy over to the closet, still holding him in a tight grip, not relinquishing even an inch of touching him. Then he opens the

closet door wide, nudges them both until they're standing directly in front of the mirror attached to it.

"Just look at yourself," Steve mutters, grins, feels his own cock twitch at the sight. Runs his free hand down Billy's chest, tracing the whole beautiful glory of it. "Fuck, but you look good enough to eat, babe."

--

Billy takes them both in with hunger, and presses back into Steve's arms with a groan.

"Fuck, want you to fuck me, so bad," he breathes. Vaguely aware that he should probably not be encouraging this, but not giving a damn.

—

"Mmmmh," Steve hums, forgetting that his parents are under the same roof now, or maybe just *wanting* to forget. Billy, naked and flushed and moaning in his arms, he can't resist.

"I wanna fuck you, just like this," he whispers, grinds his cock into Billy's naked ass, squeezes his dick again. "Wanna watch you, watch you watch yourself when you take my cock…"

—

"Fuck, yeah," Billy shudders at how low and promising Steve's voice has gone, and presses his ass back against Steve's still-clothed dick. "*Do it,*" he demands, breathless. But Steve hardly has time to move before there's a call from the hall and a tap on the door.

—

"Stevie?" It's his mother's voice, fuck! Steve flinches, snatches his hands away from Billy as if his mother could see what they are doing even through his closed bedroom door. *Fuck*. Maybe she can feel if when he's about to get some, like a terrible motherly sex radar.

"Yeah mom," he replies, in as bored and unbothered a voice as he possibly can while simultaneously shoving Billy towards the bathroom and then slowly opening the door, trying to open it just

enough so it seems natural, and not enough that she can see his half-hard dick through his shorts.

“I talked to your dad, honey,” his mother smiles at him. “He’s not mad at you, about the game.”

Steve takes a deep breath. Swallows. Attempts to smile back. “Thanks, mom,” he replies.

“And we’re going to have brunch at the Club to celebrate your big win,” she continues, like she is giving him a big treat. As if. Steve knows his dad is just going for the chance to hang around his associates and talk shop.

“But *mom*, Billy is here—”

“Oh, he can come if you want,” she waves aside his protests. “Be downstairs in fifteen minutes, alright, sweetie? Your dad’s blood sugar is low, you know how he gets.”

She pets his cheek and turns to leave.

Steve closes the door again, leans against it and groans. Then he looks up at Billy, still standing at the bathroom door.

“I guess you’re not feeling like a round of golf, huh?” he asks miserably.

—

“Sorry, babe, you’ve got the *wrong* boyfriend if you want someone to make small talk with the Harringtons over cucumber sandwiches or whatever you people eat.”

Billy had snatched his jeans off the bed when Steve pushed him toward the bathroom. He pulls them on over his unwilling erection now and crosses the room to grab his shirt. Kisses Steve’s cheek before he pulls it on over his head.

“You wouldn’t like me in civilized company anyway.”

—

“I would like you in any kind of company there is,” Steve protests morosely. Billy seriously preparing to leave, even if expected, has thoroughly taken all the good mood of this morning. And he should get dressed too, fuck. Despite the pressing time, Steve reels Billy in close once more, as if holding him tightly enough could change his mind.

“When will I see you again?” he asks, knowing the answer will be something like *Monday at school*, but still desperately clinging on to a shred of hope that Billy maybe, just maybe, wants to be bad instead of cautious.

—

Billy groans and stays there for a second before he feels Steve’s cock against him and has to shove him off before he falls back into something they don’t have time for.

“You know we’re still not out of this yet, baby,” he says softly. “We’ve gotta stay sharp or this doesn’t work.”

He presses a stupidly domestic little kiss into Steve’s cheek.

“You’re sticking to the deal, right, pretty boy? I need you to find a girl. Soon. Make it good.” He kisses Steve’s pouting lips. “Make me jealous.”

—

Damn. Steve had forgotten all about that stupid promise Billy had wrangled out of him last night at the party. He frowns, shakes his head.

“Do I *have* to?” he asks. “I know, you think people will keep talking, but maybe if I just keep a really low profile for a bit?”

—

“You’re kidding me,” Billy sighs and pulls away to look Steve in the eye. “Seriously?” He kisses him tiredly. “Steve… We already talked about this. You promised me.”

—

Steve is still frowning, but nods after a moment of hesitation. It comes back to him why he made the promise in the first place. Billy needs it to set his mind at ease. It doesn't matter what Steve thinks the real world will think or say, in reaction to whatever he does. As long as Billy is still petrified that his dad might catch the tail end of some gossip about him, however unlikely that is, he won't feel good about their whole… thing. Relationship. Whatever you want to call it. Steve owes it to him to try, at least.

"Alright," he says, giving Billy a quick kiss. "I'll make you green with envy." It doesn't feel like a good thing.

—

Billy nods. He knows how reluctant Steve is feeling about this. Isn't unfamiliar with the feeling himself.

"Thanks, sweetheart," he says, a little joking and a little earnest. "I love you."

He presses one more quick kiss to Steve's lips and grabs his jacket from the floor before turning for the bedroom door.

—

"Hey," Steve calls out, following him to the door, reaching for Billy, not willing to relinquish him, not *yet*— he casts about for something to say that will make Billy stay just a minute longer, at least… And comes up empty. He just grabs Billy's shirt in his fists and kisses him, one last time.

"It'll be like forever till I see you again," he says dully.

—

Billy hums and kisses Steve's frowning mouth.

"You sap," he breathes, but there's no heat to it, just the warmth of feeling needed. Feeling loved. Feeling like he belongs to someone. Billy brushes his fingers down Steve's chest and catches the outline of

the pendant under his shirt. Pulls it out with a smile, and over Steve's head, quickly slipping it around his own neck and under his shirt.

"It'll go by in no time," he says, and presses his lips to Steve's again, kissing him quick and deep.

--

"Yeah, sure," Steve agrees, chasing Billy's lips with his own when he tries to pull away. He isn't really convinced, though.

"Stevie!" His mother calls from downstairs. He curses, and pulls away. "Go," he begs, because apparently he is unable to actually let Billy go otherwise. "And don't talk to my parents on your way out, or they'll suck out your soul."

—

Billy chuckles, letting their foreheads rest together for a second before he pushes Steve away from him with a hand on his chest.

"Have fun making business connections, baby, be good," he winks, stepping backwards toward the door, and pulling it open before he turns on his heel and heads out.

--

Steve watches Billy leave, staring at his back retreating down the hall. Business connections. Did Billy mean it? Does he know about his dad's plans to take him into the firm as soon as Steve graduates? It had seemed like a good idea at the time when Nancy and a house in a cul-de-sac were still a possibility, but now?

Nancy, Steve thinks while he quickly puts on some fresh clothes, and makes his way downstairs. There's something niggling at the back of his mind, but he can't put his finger on it. The thought of Nancy follows him even to brunch, but it doesn't manifest until he swims a few laps in the pool later that night to get his mind off of things. The memory of Nancy, her wet clothes clinging to her, her eyes laughing as he pulls her into a watery kiss.

Nancy.

Nancy is a girl.

Notes for the Chapter:

After Notes: Billy POV by ficsandfuckery (women-seem-wicked on tumblr), Steve and Linda POVs by blithesea (bites-heal on tumblr).

6. Just What I Needed

Summary for the Chapter:

> Steve and Nancy concoct a plan. Romance! Jealousy! Fistfights! True love! Tune in for the big finale.

It takes a bit of thinking things through, but by Sunday afternoon, Steve is quite sure that asking Nancy for help is his best bet for this *looking straight* thing. It's kind of genius, in a way, he thinks proudly. If he convinces everyone in school he's still hung up on Nancy, and Nancy is in on the joke, nobody gets hurt. Honestly, he should get some kind of medal for Services to the Betterment of Humankind for just thinking of it.

The only hang up is Nancy herself. After what happened between her and Steve, anything *resembling* cheating instantly makes her feel guilty. She'll likely take a bit of convincing to go along with this. But she did also tell him that he could always count on her for help, Steve remembers. And right now, he really needs it. Because if there's one thing he's sure of, it's that he can't just find some random girl and charm her out of her panties just for the gossip it'd generate. That just wouldn't be right.

They'll just have to get Jonathan in on it, too, Steve realizes with a sinking feeling. He'd rather never give Jonathan even a hint of an inkling of what might be going on with him and Billy, but… it's still better to have Jonathan know than have Billy leave and have there be nothing to know anyway.

First he thinks of *calling* Nancy, but then decides to drive over and plead his case in person. There was a time when she just couldn't resist his eyes whenever he begged for something. Maybe those times aren't entirely forgotten yet.

So when he pulls up at the Wheeler's house and looks up at Nancy's window out of habit, he sees her silhouette against a lamp inside. *Probably studying*, he thinks fondly. And then he just decides to go the whole nine yards, for old times' sake. So he starts climbing up the garage roof, stealthy like a ninja.

--

Nancy almost jumps out of her skin when she hears the knock on the window. She isn't expecting it at 7pm on a Sunday. Not since she and Steve ended things. Jonathan *doesn't* climb people's houses. So when she shuffles to her window and pushes it open, it's with both surprise and a complete lack of it that she finds Steve hunched there, careful on the roof.

"Steve?" she hisses, glancing over her shoulder instinctively, even though her door is closed and locked for the night already - something she's taken to since Mike started thinking she would be his one-stop-shop for advice with that poor girl El, who he seems to think he's dating. "What're you *doing* here?"

Smiling, apparently. But not enough to look high or drunk. Just nervous. He nods towards her room and she rolls her eyes and steps back, letting him in.

"Steve, what's going on? Are you okay?"

--

"Yeah, I'm fine, just, you know, thought I'd drop in," he says, going for nonchalance. But from the look on Nancy's face, she isn't buying it. So he busies himself brushing some invisible dust off his jeans and sits down on her bed, next to all her cue-cards.

Fuck, but how to lead into the reason for his coming in some clever, subtle way? Steve tries to come up with something and falls short, so in the end he just looks her straight in the eyes and says, "Nance, I need your help."

—

Nancy frowns and sits down next to Steve on the bed. He doesn't look hurt, doesn't look scared, or even urgent. But still, she can tell he's not comfortable or confident being here on her bed again, asking her for whatever he's about to ask her. She bites her lip and takes his hand in hers. Realizes she's initiated more hand holding with him in the past week than she did in a month of dating, and pushes that

thought down.

“Is this about Billy Hargrove?” she asks.

--

Steve gulps, stares. How on earth would she know that? He never told her a thing! Fuck, he never even meant to bring up Billy’s name in this, Billy’s gonna be so mad—

“What?” Steve squawks, unable to look into her eyes. “No! Why would you— are you joking? Billy Hargrove? What the hell, Nancy?”

—

“Steve,” Nancy whispers sternly, glancing at her door. He quiets quickly, looking sheepish. “He’s the guy you like, isn’t he?” she continues, “I saw you at the game, Steve, when he and Vicky… You couldn’t keep your eyes off him. He’s the one, isn’t he?”

--

God. Billy was right. If he’s *that* obvious, they really need to convince the public he’s only into girls.

Steve sighs and deflates a little. Does it make any sense to deny it now? Nancy is so sure of herself. Why the hell does he always have to have a thing for the smart ones?

“You can’t tell anyone,” he says quietly. “His dad— if people hear about it—” He can’t tell Nancy about Billy’s dad though. He doesn’t have the right. Billy wouldn’t want it. “No one can know, okay?”

—

Nancy feels slightly offended at the insinuation that she *would* tell, but crosses her heart quickly anyway.

“Of course,” she says. “Your secret’s safe. God, *Billy* though? Steve, I guess he’s cute or whatever, but…”

--

“Hey now,” Steve frowns. “Don’t do that, you don’t know him, he’s not an asshole once you get to know him a little better.” That sounds way too weak, but to explain to Nancy all the little things that make Billy so great? That would take forever. And go into much more intimate detail than he thinks he can share with her now.

“And cute, come on,” he says, shaking his head. *Cute* isn’t a word he would ever have picked for Billy. Drop-dead gorgeous, sure.

“But yeah, he’s why I need your help.”

—

Nancy nods quickly, brows set in a slight frown.

“Anything,” she says, trying not to sound too worried.

—

Okay, that feels way too easy. Steve laughs, a little puzzled. “You don’t even know what I’m about to ask— you might hate it, you know. Probably will.”

He runs his hands through his hair, takes a deep breath.

“IneedtomakeeveryonethinkI’mstillinlovewithyou,” he rushes out, maybe a bit too quickly, because Nancy just stares at him, frowning.

“You know that thing I said, in class. It was an *accident*. I need people to forget about it and I thought, if they think I’m still crazy in love with you…” God, it sounds so stupid. He bites his lip, looks up at her carefully.

—

Nancy can’t help it. She starts laughing. The surrealness of it all gets to her, and with the added relief of really knowing once and for all that Steve *has* moved on, she’s feeling too light to keep it all in.

—

Steve feels the hope go out of him like air out of a pricked balloon.

He gets up from the bed, mutters, “Alright, nevermind then.” Heads for the window.

—

“Hey! *Steve*, no, come back. I’m sorry for laughing. It’s a good idea. You’re right, okay?” Nancy tugs Steve back onto her bed impatiently and he sprawls a bit. Looks at her hesitantly still, like he thinks she’s making fun of him. “Obviously I’ll help you. But we’ll need a solid plan. Did you have an idea for how to do it?”

—

Steve looks at her, still not quite able to believe this easy victory. He had imagined her needing much more convincing, really. He had all these points planned, to convince her.

“You don’t mind?” He asks, just to be sure. “People are gonna talk, you know. That’s kinda the point, but. It might not all be particularly nice?”

—

Nancy rolls her eyes.

“Let them. I don’t care, I’ve been called worse, Steve, and if it means they’ll get off *your* back for the last few months you’re at school here…” she leans in and kisses his cheek. Hates talking about his near future like that because it makes her so anxious, moreso for the fact that it seems to make him more than a little uncomfortable. Like he still doesn’t really have a plan. “Of course I’ll do it,” she says.

—

Steve nods, feeling a bit overwhelmed with it all. He takes her hand, squeezes it. Is glad to have a friend in all this.

“I was thinking I could take you out for ice-cream, maybe,” he starts, feeling more nervous than he would if this was a *real* date.

“To get people to see us together, you know?” It sounds dumb when he says it out loud.

—

Nancy considers it, but only for a moment.

“Like a date?” she says. “No, I don’t think that’ll work. If we pretend to start dating again - even casually - people will expect to see us around together like that *often*. And inevitably I’d get *caught* with Jonathan again, and you’d never *not* be the subject of their gossip crap.”

Steve looks like he’s going to protest, but Nancy soldiers on.

“There’s a better option. Only requires one or two big gestures and then you can go back to ‘confirmed bachelor’ status and no one will blame you being single for the rest of the year. It does require you to make a bit more of a fool of yourself though, and I’ll look even more of a stuck-up bitch than I already do…”

—

“Hey now,” Steve protests, but then stops, feeling a bit silly defending Nancy from herself.

“I can be a fool,” he says, shrugging. “Don’t have much ground to lose in this school anyway, I guess.

“What kind of grand gesture?”

—

Nancy bites her lip and glances up at Steve guiltily.

“You have to try to get me back. And I have to turn you down,” she says. “A couple times, separated by maybe a week. People will fill in the gaps themselves. You’ve been single this whole time because you miss me so much. I’ve wrecked you.”

It doesn’t feel as fictional as it should. Until Steve’s confession just days ago she thought it was *true*.

—

“Yeah, ok.” Steve smiles, because Nancy is smart. He shifts on the bed, leaning closer and hugging his knee. “I guess I could… leave some roses in your locker? And you could complain real loud to everyone what a jerk I am, when you find them?”

—

Nancy nods.

“Perfect. Nice and simple. Not too showy. Doesn’t look like you’re trying to prove something to anyone but me.”

She smiles.

“We can let that stew for a week or so, and then… we could do something stupid. An argument in the cafeteria? I guess I’m going to have to tell Jonathan at least a little of what’s going on, so he doesn’t think you’ve turned on him after all. D’you think we could use him somehow? I mean, a stand-off sort of thing is normal for situations like this, right?”

—

“As long as we don’t tell him about Billy,” Steve nods. He has to insist on that one, even if, god. If Nancy figured it out after the stupid game, Jonathan probably did, too. He seems way too savvy about all that queer stuff. But still.

“Oh hey,” he says, brightening up. “Maybe he could punch me or something? Show everyone he thinks I’m a threat. And people love a good fight.”

—

Nancy’s eyes widen.

“You want him to hit you? Jesus, Steve, you’re really serious about this thing. Would it be so bad if people kept talking about that ‘babe’ thing for a couple more weeks and trailed off on their own?”

—

Steve shrugs. He hesitates a moment, then decides, fuck it. She knows every last little thing about him. Might as well go all in now.

“I wouldn’t mind, if it was just me, you know?” he asks, looking down at the bedspread. “But I promised him. After the Vicky thing. I promised I’d make some rumors of my own with a girl, if he stopped.”

—

Nancy freezes. *Promised him? If he stopped?*

“Wait, Billy is—?” she doesn’t believe it. “He knows?” Surely she’s mishearing something.

—

Steve chokes out a laugh, though it doesn’t feel very funny, not really. “Yeah, he knows,” he admits, shrugging, like it’s no big deal. “We’ve been… you know. For awhile now.”

He closes his eyes, almost expecting the earth to open up and swallow him whole at this kind of momentous confession.

—

Nancy can’t even speak. Just tries, for a second, to imagine Steve and *Billy Hargrove.* Kissing. Holding hands. Doing anything besides playing basketball and yelling at each other.

Why?! she wants to ask. But she’s here to be supportive. So she just nods numbly.

“Huh,” she says, staring at the carpet. She stops nodding. *We’ve been… you know…* Nancy doesn’t know at all. But now that her curiosity is piqued…

“So you’re… For a while? How does that work? Do you *hang out*? Do you go on *dates*? Or is it just…” she probably blushes, “y’know… physical?” Jesus Christ.

—

“*Nancy*,” Steve groans. “I don’t ask that kind of shit about you and Jonathan, do I?”

—

Nancy definitely blushes then.

“I’m not asking for *details*, I’m just-- you’re a *romantic*, Steve. You’re looking for something that I don’t think-- Billy Hargrove-- He’s not just using you, is he?”

--

“*No*!” Steve feels insulted on Billy’s behalf. “No, he wouldn’t do that. Well, he would, *obviously*,” *Vicky Marsden is evidence enough of that*, “but… He’s not. With me. He’s kinda sweet, actually. Once you get to know him.”

Just the thought of Billy, smiling at him, makes his stomach feel all warm and tingly now. Fuck, Billy was right. He is such a *sap*.

“And yeah, if you have to know. We’ve been going on actual *dates*. Just to places out of the way, though.”

—

“He’s *sweet*?” Nancy frowns. “Sweet like a demogorgon, how its mouth looks like a flower? Steve…”

--

“No, Nancy. Actually *sweet*,” Steve insists, blushing a little, because talking about this stuff is *hard*. He tries to think of something good to tell her.

“Like… He gives Tommy H shit because he knows that it’ll make me feel better,” he says, smiling at the memory. Nancy nods at that. She doesn’t have any love to lose on Tommy. Feeling encouraged, Steve goes on.

“He patched me up after— after I got hurt at the beginning of the semester,” he says, feeling a bit bad for leaving out half the truth. But

he knows Nancy wouldn't understand about what actually went down in that parking lot.

"And he… When he gets us food, he buys fries every time. He hates fries."

Nancy smiles at that. Probably remembers one of the many times she tried to preach to him about healthier eating.

Now that he's thinking about all the ways Billy has been sweet, it's getting hard to stop. He almost tells her how Billy was gonna suck him off just to make him feel better after his parents yelled at him the other day, but, no. That's going a bit too far.

"He… he cheers me on when I'm doing well at basketball, you know? Like he actually really cares? And when I suck, he tries to give me advice. I mean, to everybody else - and to me, at first - it seemed like he was just doing it to be a dick, but that's just his delivery of it. Y'know? Like he *is* an asshole. But he's a nice asshole." He smiles.

"He never even makes fun of me for being kinda clueless about, you know. The whole gay sex thing."

—

Nancy's cheeks flush and she holds up a hand.

"Okay, Steve. I get it. You can stop there," she insists. "I believe you. He's a total sweetheart." She's not being as sarcastic as she meant to be, though. Because while those examples might not seem like the *best* boyfriend material, they sound believably like things Billy might do. And maybe Steve's right. She ought to give him a chance.

"So we're doing this. I can talk to Jonathan about it tomorrow morning, but we should give him some time just in case. Let's say the plan goes into motion… Wednesday?"

--

"Wednesday," Steve agrees, and smiles. The knowledge that he has Nancy on his side now, to do this stupid thing without anyone actually getting hurt almost makes him giddy.

They sit on Nancy's bed and talk through different scenarios of Steve making a complete fool of himself in the name of love until she points out the time. Steve would gladly have kept plotting all night long.

"Thanks, Nance," he says as he steps towards the window. "Feels good to have you in my corner." He winks at her and climbs out the way he came.

By the time he sees her on Monday, sitting outside with Jonathan for lunch, he is so psyched up for their plans that he almost wishes Jonathan could punch him then and there.

"So, whaddaya say?" he asks Jonathan, nudging his side. "Pretty good idea, huh?"

—

Nancy tenses. Shakes her head quickly at Steve, as Jonathan frowns and glances up at him, making space for him on the bench.

"I didn't--" Nancy cuts Jonathan's response short before it can begin. "I hadn't gotten that far yet, Steve," she bites her lip guiltily.

--

"Oh. Huh. Um." Steve runs his hand through his hair. He had actually been quite glad not to be around when Nancy was going to tell Jonathan about the whole thing. Maybe he can duck back inside and come back once she's done telling him?

Coward, a voice whispers in his mind. So he stays.

"So Nancy's come up with this great plan to get people to forget about, you know. The thing I said. Last week," he gives her an in, and then looks at her expectantly to go on. Silently praying that she'll remember to keep Billy's name out of it.

—

Nancy doesn't know if she's grateful for Steve's presence here for this or not. But suddenly she's thinking about this plan from Jonathan's

perspective, and feels sure he's going to hate it. She reaches over the table for his hands, and Jonathan allows her to hold them, frowning.

"What's the plan?" he asks, skeptically.

"Steve is going to make some grand gestures. Towards me. Y'know, like he's still in love with me or something. That way the school will *know* he's not a--" she glances quickly at Steve, stopping herself from saying the word that's being thrown around so much lately.

Jonathan shrugs and pulls his hands away to pick up a sandwich.

"I don't get it," he says. "Why don't you just wait for it to pass? Or, y'know, date one of the tons of girls at this school who'd kill for the chance to get their hands on you?"

--

Steve blinks, looks at Nancy for help with this. Realizes Jonathan probably won't take it very well if it's coming from *her*.

He sighs, and leans a bit closer, so there's no danger of them being overheard. "Listen," he says, licks his lips. "I want people to stop talking about it… because it's true, alright? I am," he swallows, because fuck, this shit is *hard*. "I like guys."

—

Nancy glances between them for a second in shock. She hadn't expected Steve to come out like that, and clearly Jonathan hadn't either. But he seems to be taking it well. Despite the fact that the way Steve's sitting close to him to spill the secret might freak out anybody else.

"Shit," Jonathan just breathes after a moment, and glances at Nancy. He smiles a little, and nods. "Okay," he says. "Let's bust this rumor up. Step one, though, Steve, if you're about to try and steal your girl back from me, you shouldn't look like you like me so much," he smirks, and shoves Steve away a couple inches with his elbow.

Steve moves obligingly and flashes Nancy a smile.

--

Billy feels every day that he doesn't hear new rumors about Steve Harrington like an ache in his chest. On Monday Vicky confronts him about ditching her at the afterparty and he shrugs her off, tells her he went home with some other girl he can't remember the name of (all he remembers, conveniently, is that she had a perfect ass), and that he assumed she'd do fine on her own. She storms off on her own. No break-up necessary, because they weren't even really dating to begin with. The beauty of girls like her is that they never bother with labels like that.

Not like Steve.

Steve.

They meet eyes in the halls, and when Billy passes through the gym during Steve's P.E. period to grab something from his locker, Steve does a trick-shot he almost definitely learned from watching Billy play. Billy smiles like an idiot and has to look away. *Shit,* he's so gone for this guy.

It isn't until Wednesday morning that he finally gets what he's been holding his breath for since he left Steve's room that weekend, and it's simultaneously so tame that he wants to laugh, and so real he feels breathless with how deeply it hurts to watch.

--

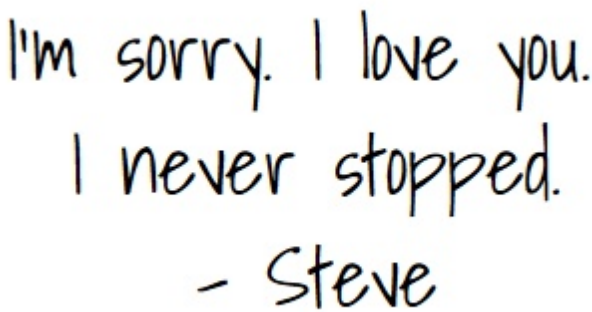
There's roses, like she expected, but there's about two dozen more than she expected. *Steve always was one for the grandest of gestures.* They're covering everything in her locker, spill out the moment she opens it. There's loose petals even, which on first glance look accidental - the result of too many flowers and not enough care taken - but no, her books are scattered with rose petals. On purpose. *Jesus.*

"Oh my god, Nancy!" Lindsay squeals from over her shoulder. "Are those from Jonathan? I didn't realize he was so romantic! Did you have *sex*?"

Nancy flushes and shrugs.

“I don’t know! I don’t *think* Jonathan would do this…”

She digs around in the locker, looking for a note. Is frantic for a moment when she can’t find one. She *told* Steve to write a note, didn’t she? But at the last moment her fingers curl around a bit of notebook paper and she lets out a breath as she brings it out for both of them to see.



“Oh. My. God,” Lindsay breathes.

“Steve?” Nancy says out loud, incredulously. She can hear the whispers and feel the stares behind her. Good. “I can’t believe this,” she says to Lindsay, shaking her head. “What does he think he’s doing?!”

“He’s so into you, Nancy,” Lindsay shakes her head sadly. “It would be romantic if it wasn’t so *pathetic*.”

Nancy has to bite her lip to keep from saying something about Lindsay’s pathetic life. Just shakes her head instead and quickly slams her locker shut, bringing even more attention to it as flower petals whirl from it in the wind the door generates.

--

Dammit, I was gonna get us some roses… for rose petals on the bed… Steve’s voice rings in Billy’s ears, and he knows it’s stupid. Roses are about the most generic form of romance that is out there. Billy’s made fun of Steve’s use of them plenty of times before. And Nancy is

a *girl*. Steve is just doing what Billy asked him to. He just… hadn't thought he'd go that far. He'd been about to fuck someone else for the lie, sure, but Steve telling *Nancy Wheeler* that he still *loves* her…

Billy's breathing harder than he should be, feels his grasp on himself slipping a little. It's only the sudden ringing of the bell for first period that keeps him from walking straight out the front door. Not to ditch, he tells himself, he doesn't want to ditch over something that small, it's just fucking roses, he just needs a second to *breathe*.

--

Nancy sits behind Billy in Calculus. It's the only class they have together, her being a year below him and Steve. She's never given him much thought, he's usually pretty quiet in class aside from the occasional lazy answer to the teacher's questions - always sounds like he's been interrupted doing something much more important, but always gets the answer right.

Today, though, she pays him plenty attention. Namely because he keeps sneaking glances over his shoulder and across the classroom at *her*, when he thinks she's not looking. Looks that make Nancy feel like he might just be plotting her death. Looks that focus painfully on the note she keeps taking out in her classes, or on the rose petals that still occasionally fall out of her things.

Any doubt in her mind that Steve might have made it all up, that his *thing* with Billy Hargrove was a fiction or was all in his head, have disappeared by the end of the period. Replaced with fears for her safety, and concern that maybe Steve and Billy didn't plan out the whole *cover* thing quite as explicitly as Steve had seemed to think.

The last time Billy glances over his shoulder at her before the bell, she flashes him a quick, apologetic smile. But his eyes just narrow further and he turns quickly away.

--

The change in the buzz around him is palpable even before lunch, Steve notes with satisfaction. Before that, hardly anyone had given him much grief anymore, except for a few half-heated slurs from the

usual assholes. Now people are staring and whispering behind their hands again, mostly looking at him with pity or mild disgust, though a few freshmen girls just turn fluttery and breathless when he passes them in the hall.

He doesn't see Billy, which is a pity, because this whole thing is working like a charm, and he'd very much liked to see Billy look appreciative, maybe even proud of him a bit? As far as impact goes, this whole charade is *at least* as good as the Vicky thing.

He skips the cafeteria so as not to muddle up The Plan. Next time he eats in there Jonathan is going to go all jealous on his ass and punch him in the face. So today he just retreats into his car, tearing into the sandwiches he brought from home and blasting that Queen tape Billy liked. He misses Billy keenly, but at least now he has The Plan to console him. After they've gone through with that, maybe Billy will be able to relax a bit.

That doesn't mean he isn't disappointed when Billy doesn't call him that night, though. Okay, so Billy had never said he'd call, but Steve had been hopeful that after today, he might want to talk, a bit? But even though Steve spends all night lingering close to the phone, Billy seems to have forgotten his number.

Nancy, however, calls after dinner to check in on him. "That went quite well, don't you think?"

He agrees.

--

Billy listens with false disinterest Friday at lunch, as the table around him hums with gossip about the possible rekindling of the romance between the fallen king and queen of the school. Debates have been raging since Wednesday, over whether the roses were a romantic gesture that should be lauded and respected, or the pathetic act of some loser who's just desperate to get laid. Still, though, a good number of the more elite gossipers of Hawkins High (and in a town with so little else to do, there are many,) seem to be holding out for something more. The talk of Steve's closeted homosexuality has quieted, but not died out. Seems to be sizzling still under the surface.

Roses are one thing, but they'll need more convincing.

Even as Steve enters the cafeteria for the first time that week, Billy tracking his movements through his lashes as he eats whatever lukewarm vegetable they're serving that day, Tommy H is chatting to a group of interested sophomores he's taken to hanging out with. About how Steve always hung out with him more than seemed normal. How he seemed to like going swimming with Tommy more than he should. How it's all some sort of sign that Steve's a fag.

Billy has to work hard not to crush the plastic fork in his hand, or turn around and jab it in Tommy's smug fucking face. *You were best friends, asshole. Of course you hung out. And he was on fucking swim team in middle school. What do you expect!* But he stops himself from continuing to rant on in his mind, knowing how quickly that can translate to real shouting, and from there…

--

Steve straggles a little behind for lunch on Friday, all according to plan. *Wait until the cafeteria is full*, he can still hear Nancy's calm voice, giving him instructions. *Get us a good audience.*

He rolls his shoulders, takes a deep breath. *Be convincing.* Acting has never been one of his strong points, the best role he ever got in grade school nativity was third tree from the left. Nothing for it now. "But I love you, Nancy," he mutters, practising his lines, "and I know you love me, too."

Alright, no more dawdling. He walks into the room, towards the table where Nancy and Jonathan are sitting. It's drizzling outside, so the cafeteria is packed. Good.

"Hey Nancy," he says, just a touch louder than he usually would. And he can feel people's conversations trail off all around him. It's on.

—

Nancy glances at Jonathan. Has to keep herself from smiling proudly. He's already glanced up at Steve, looking protective like she's only ever seen him twice before. She tries not to think of those times.

“Hey… Steve,” she frowns up at her ex-boyfriend turned co-conspirator. She bites her lip. “What’s up?”

--

Steve does his best to look lovelorn, and a little hopeful. It feels idiotic. But at least Nancy gave him some helpful tips. *Imagine you’re still in middle school. Imagine you still have your braces.* “Did you, um. Did you find my note?”

—

Nancy glances around them, in theory because she’s worried someone will hear. In practice, because she’s worried no one will hear. She locks eyes with Cynthia, from History, and makes a face like *oh my god, this is so embarrassing! Help!* Knows her only help will be to notify everyone else around them to the situation.

“Steve, maybe we should talk somewhere more private,” she suggests, and stands. That action gets them a few more eyes. Good.

--

“Private?” Steve huffs a laugh. “I don’t think that’s necessary, I mean…” He leans closer, tries to take her hand, which she takes away with an exaggerated flourish.

“You don’t have to be ashamed of it, Nancy,” he says, and then notices her raised eyebrows. Their signal that he needs to be louder.

“Are you still gonna pretend that you don’t have feelings for me? After all we’ve been through?”

—

Nancy sets her jaw. Keeps one eyebrow raised. Sighs.

“Steve, please,” she begs. “We’ve been through all of this. I’ve moved *on!*”

—

“But Nancy, I *love* you!” Steve exclaims, and puts his hand on her arm, all the better to give Jonathan an in. Though to be quite honest, he could go on like this for a bit. It’s kinda fun, now that he’s started to get his bearings.

“And I know you love me, too!”

—

Jonathan pushes in then. A bit early, but she can feel tension in his touch so real it almost even convinces *her*.

“Back off, Steve,” he growls, and she makes a mental note to request that tone *later*. “She *told* you she’s not interested.”

Nancy puts a hand against his chest as if to push him back. In reality she doesn’t push at all. Makes Jonathan look that much stronger, that her effort does nothing at all to him.

“Jonathan, please,” she begs, and glances back at Steve. “Steve, let it go--”

--

“You stay out of it, man!” Steve growls, good and loud. “Let Nancy speak for herself! Nancy, come on, you know the truth! Just admit it and…” he pauses, not just for dramatic effect, but because the words are a bit much, even for him. *Bite the bullet, Steve*, Nancy says in his head. *Boys are cheesy*.

“Just follow your heart, Nance!”

—

It’s out of her hands now. Time for Jonathan to take the wheel. And oh *does* he.

“Hey, leave her the fuck alone, Steve,” he says in a voice that carries across the cafeteria quickly, pushing past her to stand between her and Steve. “She’s with me now, and she’s finally fucking happy. So fucking back off!”

Nancy is acutely aware of the movement behind the lunch counter, as the lunch ladies seem to catch on to the drama and one of them looks to be calling the office. *Alright boys, hurry it up.* She tugs Jonathan's sleeve.

"Jonathan, come on!" she entreats him, seeming to want nothing more than to get away. His eyes flash to the lunch counter and he nods almost imperceptibly.

—

"Yeah, come *on*, Jonathan," Steve mocks. "You just can't handle the truth, man! Nancy always loved me more than you!"

And it's not like he hasn't known it was coming, but somehow, Jonathan's quick uppercut still manages to surprise him.

—

Billy's blood is racing in his veins and his fists clench under the table. *Steve.* He wants to go help him. Save him. Lay out the fucker who thinks he can get away with hitting *his* baby, but it's staged. He knows this is staged. It has to be. It's *meant* to show how straight Steve is. Billy storming in to save him would go against all of that. And it's kind of genius. Billy wishes he'd thought of it, but he doesn't think it'd be as convincing a look on him - lovelorn and desperately in need of one person's affection - *who would ever believe Billy Hargrove could feel that way?*

Byers pulls Steve close and swings again, and while the first one had been done with the clear intent of not actually hurting him, this one has Steve groaning for real. And he's still babbling about how much he loves the Wheeler bitch. *Jesus*. Billy's throat constricts a bit and he has to look away.

—

Even though Jonathan is veering slightly off script, what with the couple of punches that actually make Steve see stars for a second, Steve himself is determined to see this shit through, just as they planned. He yells and launches himself at Jonathan's midsection,

felling them both, and makes sure after rolling on the ground a bit that Jonathan ends up on top, getting a couple more good ones in. Ugh, holy shit. That guy still has a mean left hook.

—

“Jonathan, stop!”

Her shouting didn’t mean anything to start, but it’s starting to. She hadn’t been happy with both their insistence that Jon should draw blood, but this is beyond that now. Steve is getting *hurt*.

“Jonathan!”

“Byers, what the hell are you doing!”

Nancy turns as Principal Marsh strides into the room with Coach Fillmer at his side, who steps forward to pull Jonathan off of Steve and help them both up. A flash of dirty blonde hair catches Nancy’s eye at the cafeteria door. Billy. She frowns.

—

“Alright, you two punks, in my office, right now!”

Steve wipes his nose, winces when his hand comes away bloody. Well, that’s good. He’s kinda hoping that he’s bleeding onto his shirt so the rest of the room can see it too. When he casts a quick glance around, he catches a glimpse of a familiar form, leaving. Is it Billy, or did Jonathan hit him too hard on the eye? He shakes his head to clear it, and ends up making his nose bleed some more.

“Anyone got a hanky or something?” he murmurs, and someone presses one into his hand as he and Jonathan are escorted towards the principal's office. Steve misses most of the lecture there, because even with the pain in his face, he’s just so damn proud. They fucking *did it*.

“And here’s to a job well-done,” he says later, when he and Nancy and Jonathan are sitting in the Harrington’s kitchen, toasting with ice-cold ginger ale.

“Cheers,” they all agree, and drink. Steve holds the cool bottle against the side of his nose, sighs. The swelling’s already gone down a lot since the school nurse gave him some ice for it, and he still managed to bleed onto the couch in the principal’s office beforehand. Win-win.

“And thanks for going all in, man, you were fucking fantastic,” Steve smiles at Jonathan. “Hey, if I didn’t know any better, I’d have thought you were really trying to beat me up there…”

—

Billy waits outside the cafeteria, but Steve is ushered past him so fast he doesn’t get a look at the damage. He looks for him between classes, but doesn’t see him anywhere. He even waits in the parking lot until well after the final bell has rung, but Steve doesn’t come out and finally Billy has to give in to Max’s complaints about being late for some show she wants to watch on TV.

It isn’t until after Neil comes home and insists on an early dinner, that Billy’s able to get away. He speeds for Steve’s house, and tenses when he sees the Byers freak’s car in the driveway, but doesn’t let that stop him from circling around the back, where light pours from the kitchen windows.

—

They all jump at the sound of the door handle jiggling, followed by an impatient knock, but Nancy’s the first to take action when she glances out through the glass and sees who it is. *Billy*. She unlocks and opens the door, and he shoulders past her in a second, going straight for Steve.

“Are you alright?” she can tell he’s holding back, but only a little bit. He puts a hand on either of Steve’s shoulders and looks him over with great concern. The fingers trailing over Steve’s bandaged cheek are gentle.

Nancy glances over at Jonathan, who seems to be making the connection and doesn’t look too happy about it. He backs into the counter a little to put distance between himself and Billy.

—

“Hey,” Steve says, smiling, and he is so glad to see Billy, it almost makes him a little dizzy with the need to kiss him. It has been so long, like days going without air to breathe. He wants to smooth away the frown lines on his face. Everything has been going so well!

“I’m fine,” he says, though he holds still as to not interrupt the gentle way Billy is touching him, because that feels so nice, even when it twinges. “Did you see it? Wasn’t it great?”

He can see Billy cast a glance at the other two, but Steve is still too busy drinking in all of Billy’s closeness. Touching him. It would only take leaning in a tiny amount…

Billy’s fingers run gently over his blackened eye. Steve smiles again, closes it for a moment before saying, “Jonathan was a real trooper. Made it look like he meant it.”

—

Nancy feels a shiver at the look Billy shoots them both then.

“Yeah. He did,” he agrees with Steve, but it’s not the gushing praise Steve made it sound like, from his lips. “He did a real fine fucking job on your face, Stevie.”

The hate in his eyes makes Nancy reach for Jonathan and pull him closer to her, even as he meets Billy’s gaze and shakes his head: “I just did what Steve wanted me to do.” He squares his shoulders slightly, defensive. “What’s it to *you* anyway?” he challenges.

--

Billy’s on the freak in a heartbeat. Fist balled in the front of his shirt, holding their faces close.

“That’s none of your fucking business, Byers,” he growls, hardly aware of the fact that Steve is behind him at the other counter still, telling him to calm down, to let him go. “You may have these dipshits fooled, but you don’t fool me. I saw you today. You *liked* it.”

Billy slams him against the cabinets again to make his point.

“You come after Steve again I will *end* you, you hear me?” His heart is hammering in his chest and his fingers itch to teach this son of a bitch a lesson, but with Steve trying to pull him back by the waist, and he can’t help but give in slowly to those soft hands.

He lets Jonathan go with a shove and turns away to collect himself.

—

Steve follows, puts his arm around Billy’s shoulders, feels the tense anger coiled in those muscles. Shit.

“Relax,” he says softly. “It’s okay. Jonathan did me a favor, yeah? He didn’t have to do that.” He leans his head against Billy’s for a second, feels how the anger still seems to radiate off him like heat waves. “Jonathan and Nancy have both been great,” he says close to Billy’s ear. “Really they have.”

“Steve?” Nancy’s words make him look up at her, and he sees her cradling Jonathan in her arms, both of them looking worried and anxious, a bit like they are in the same room as a ticking bomb.

“It’s okay,” he says, louder this time. “We’re all friends here.” It’s hard to let go of Billy now, but he has to, to make this right. He crosses over to Jonathan and Nancy, and holds his hand out for Jonathan to shake. “Thanks, you guys. We owe you one.”

—

Jonathan takes the hand offered, and shakes it, glancing over Steve’s shoulder at Billy. But Billy is still turned away, almost shaking. Nancy ignores the hand when Steve turns to her next, and instead leans in and hugs him. It’s the first time she’s taken her eyes off Billy since he entered the room. She jumps when his voice sounds again, still angry, from the other side of the room.

“What do they know?”

--

Steve turns to look at Billy, breaking off his hug, and frowns like he doesn't know what Billy's talking about. Fuck. *A lot, then*, Billy surmises.

"Steve, I thought we'd *talked* about this. If we tell *anyone*--"

--

"I'm sorry, baby, I *had* to," Steve protests, wishing he could make Billy see that Nancy and Jonathan are not a threat to them, not now, not ever.

—

Billy's blood chills at that word, and he glances over Steve's shoulder. They look surprised at his renewed outburst maybe, but not at all at the fact that Steve just called him *baby*. They know *everything*.

Fuck!

"You had to tell *strangers* about our sex life, Steve? Really? What, to protect us from strangers finding out about our sex life?" Steve is advancing on him now like someone who handles wild animals, trying to come in and calm him before he scares his precious friends off. But Billy doesn't care. He hits the counter hard and points at the couple still huddled together on the opposite side of the room.

"Do you know who they are?" he asks Steve. "They're direct *fucking* lines to my old man. Steve, their little brothers hang out with Max *all the time.*" Steve's hands are on him now, under his jacket, and god they feel so good even through his clothes. His face, apologetic and worried but still guarded and a little stern, so close to Billy's is making him feel too loud, but as he quiets his throat struggles to push the words out steadily.

"All it takes is one *fucking* word, baby, and I--" Billy's voice is choked off completely and he lets Steve pull him fully into his arms, squeezing him back like his life depends on it.

--

"Shhhh," Steve soothes him. Barely resists kissing his neck, by some

feat of superhuman strength he didn't even know he possessed. But he knows he has to be careful, doesn't want to set Billy off again. "They're not gonna say a word," he promises. "Not one fucking word. Right?" He looks back at Nancy for reassurance. She is looking at him and Billy with an odd look on her face, and it takes him a moment to place it. Fuck. She is looking *worried* for him. "Right, Nance?" he repeats, raising his eyebrows.

"Of course not, Steve," she assures him, apparently frustrated that he has to ask.

"Jonathan?"

"Yeah, man. Not a fucking word." But Jonathan is looking at him wearily, too. Ugh. Where the fuck did they get the impression that he's some kind of damsel in distress?

—

Billy feels raw. Exposed. He leans into Steve's shoulder for a moment to slow his beating heart before he pulls back and nods slowly, staring up at Steve's face and forcing himself to take in the damage without cracking again.

"Okay," he says, still holding Steve tight by the waist and the back of his neck. He kisses his unhurt cheek softly. "Okay. I'm sorry, shit."

--

Nancy and Jonathan share a glance. Confusion and worry and something else, as Billy Hargrove goes completely pliant and apologetic in Steve's embrace. Jonathan flushes slightly when they kiss, and Nancy thinks she might be as well, but that's nothing to when Billy abruptly turns on them again, and advances with his hand out.

It isn't until he's right in front of them that Nancy realizes it's a gesture of peace. He looks just as uncomfortable as Jonathan does when their hands connect, but he looks sincerely apologetic.

"Sorry 'bout that," he ducks his head a bit, shameful. "Thanks for helping him out. You-- didn't have to do that."

Nancy takes his hand next and forcefully meets Billy's eyes. She can see a bit of it there, in their bright blue, the kindness and the intelligence and the passion that Steve gushed about a week ago in her bedroom. But still…

She pulls him closer to her, and though she's smirking her tone is at least serious enough that he looks a little frightened: "That threat you made Jonathan? Same goes for you. I'll hunt you down, Hargrove."

Jonathan laughs, but wraps an arm around her back supportively.

"You better listen to her, man. She doesn't mess around."

Billy just nods, and smiles a little. It's charming. He glances over his shoulder at Steve, and they share a moment that makes Nancy feel suddenly like they're trespassing on something very personal.

"Well, we'll let ourselves out then," she says, backing towards the door and pulling Jonathan with her. "Since you've got someone to take care of you now," she winks at Steve.

--

"Alright, guys. See ya, and thanks again!"

Steve steps over to Billy, wraps his arms around him from behind because every second now they're not touching feels like a complete waste. Billy surprises him a little by turning around and pulling him closer by his shirt, finally, finally kissing him properly, though the fervor with which Billy's tongue pursues his own startles a little *oomph* noise out of him. He can see Nancy's eyes go wide and Jonathan's flick away quickly, and then he can feel Billy smile into the kiss, and thinks, *you asshole, you magnificent dickhead*. By the time his hands have wandered down to Billy's ass, he can hear the back door close with a distinct snap.

Then he breaks the kiss and smiles at his boyfriend. "Yeah, let's not tell strangers about our sex life," he murmurs, a little breathless from that kiss still. "Better give them a show, instead…"

—

Billy smirks and presses another quick kiss to Steve's lips.

"They're not strangers, Steve," he teases. "They're our *friends*."

--

"You better believe it," Steve chides, but the smile refusing to leave his face undercuts any strictness of tone. He bumps his nose against Billy's cheek.

"My parents are out for dinner and drinks with some business associates. They'll be gone for a few more hours. How long can you stay?" He tries not to sound too hopeful. Anything short of *All weekend long* will be a disappointment anyway.

—

Billy smiles wide and turns his head to bite a kiss into Steve's neck.

"I can stay awhile," he says.

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FIN

Notes for the Chapter:

> After Notes: Billy and Nancy POVs by ficsandfuckery (women-seem-wicked on tumblr), Steve POV by blithesea (bites-heal on tumblr).

Author's Note:

> Billy and Nancy POVs by ficsandfuckery (women-seem-wicked on tumblr), Steve and Vicky Marsden POVs by blithesea (bites-heal on tumblr).